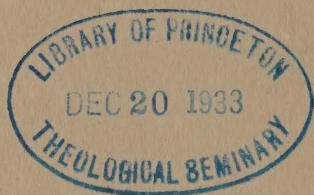


IN QUEST OF LIFE'S MEANING



Revised Edition

HENRY P. VAN DUSEN



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In quest of life's meaning

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HINTS TOWARD A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY
OF LIFE FOR STUDENTS

HENRY P. VAN DUSEN

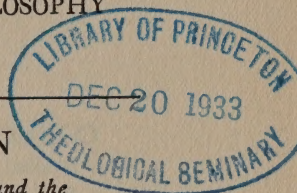
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THIS BOOK IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED
TO THOSE MEMBERS OF
THE AMERICAN STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT
MEN AND WOMEN
OF WHOSE LIVES IT IS AN ATTEMPT AT INTERPRETATION

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PREFACE

The material in this little book was originally prepared for a series of very informal vesper services at the Ozark Mountain Student Conference, June, 1926. Since then it has been revised and somewhat expanded, but the personal and conversational style has, for the most part, been retained.

It will be apparent that these studies were intended for students from a rather conservative religious background, equipped with very little scientific and philosophical training; but it is my conviction that such truth as the argument contains will stand the test of the critical, even though it be phrased in the language of the unsophisticated. No profession is made of a finished philosophy of the Christian life, but rather a few hints from one still early in the pathway of Christian experience, hints which may prove helpful to fellow questors.

I cannot fail to express my gratitude to two of those to whom the book has been dedicated who have read the entire manuscript with great care and to whose suggestions it owes much. The debt to other writers is indicated in the frequent quotations and in the Bibliography at the end. Far greater is the debt to a host of American students who have shared with me their problems, their difficulties, their hopes; for whatever merit the book may have is due to the fact that it is not primarily the product of one person's reading or thinking, but springs out of the living experience of young men and young women.

H. P. V. D.

Osterville, Mass.,
August, 1926.

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

The publication of a second edition has given opportunity for a thorough revision. The outline and framework of the book are unchanged but errors have been corrected and a number of minor changes effected in accordance with helpful criticisms. The bibliography has been completely revised.

H. P. V. D.

Union Theological Seminary,
New York,
April, 1930.

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

WHY RELIGION?

When we begin to consider the matter of religion, especially if we approach it with reflective and speculative minds, the question which often presses in upon us is not "What kind of religion shall we have?" or "What can we believe about religion?" but a prior question, "Why religion anyhow?" Here we are, setting ourselves to spend some little time, possibly several hours, in reading a book dealing primarily with religion. But why should we be interested in religion at all? Is there anything in this business which men call religion—anything really important, essential? What difference does it make to life whether religion be true or not? It is that question, I suspect, which most people are really asking about religion today.¹ It is that question which we shall seek to answer first; for, be very sure, religion never becomes real and, therefore, of any value to a man until he has given a satisfactory answer to that prior question, until he has discovered what, if any, essential place there is for this thing, religion, in the business of living.

¹ "Pure materialism and atheism are uncommon; they are found among scientists, but rarely those of the first rank, among half-baked philosophers, and among the rebel sons of Plymouth brethren. The vast majority regard religion as a sort of hobby—harmless but unessential. This indifferent class suffers not so much from crooked thinking as from no thinking at all."—Crichton Miller, "The New Psychology and the Preacher."

There is only one place where we can look for the answer to that question. If religion is what many of us have always thought it to be, something added on to life to make it more beautiful or more comforting or more happy, or, it may be, more exacting, more rigid, more difficult—like the tint of a landscape or, possibly, like the regulations of the schoolhouse; if religion is some fifth wheel which men have stuck onto life for good or ill, then religion can have no hold on you and me, for we are not much interested in fifth wheels. Unless we discover that religion proceeds right out of the heart of life itself, that in a sense it *is* life or, at least, such an essential part of life that we can no more dispense with it than we can cut out the heart or the lungs and have a whole and living body, then we shan't bother with it. This much is certain—either religion is the organic center of what we call life, or it is nothing at all. People often ask whether religion is important. Well, either it is the one supremely important thing in life because in a very real sense it is life itself, or it is worthless. Let us be sure of those alternatives at the outset.

We shall seek for an answer to our question, therefore, in the one place where you and I could honestly accept an answer—in the facts and experiences of our own lives. That is what we shall be thinking and talking about—*life*. That is the word which will run like a thread through all we say. We shall examine life. We shall try to understand life. We shall try to answer some of the questions concerning life which are deeply ingrained in our minds. We shall seek to discover the true meaning of life for ourselves, to work out together what men call “a philosophy of life.” We shall presuppose nothing except our own earnestness and an eager desire within each of us to

find fuller life. We are really setting out on a quest for life's meaning.

When we take these lives of ours and examine them under the one condition which I have suggested—an inner urge to higher living—we discover within each of us two great and ineradicable desires.

1. *Our minds crave some explanation of the Universe and of life.* Just as surely as these bodies of ours when they are alive reach out instinctively for the things they need for their health—food, air, water, exercise—just exactly so our minds when they are in any true sense alive reach out for some explanation, some interpretation of life.

You and I, supposedly, are intelligent animals. And to the man who thinks at all, this life of ours is a perplexing business. Probably it did not use to be so. Through childhood years and through boyhood, we asked no questions of life because it seemed to ask no questions of us. We went through year after year unthinkingly, enjoying it all, it may be revelling in it all, but questioning it not at all. It is only lately that insistent questionings have begun to come upon us. We are awaking to the fact that we are placed here on the outer fringes of a Universe which is full of mystery, and at the heart of a throbbing society which is full of problems.

In the first place, our college courses and, far more, the general knowledge which unconsciously has become a part of us have made us realize that we are an infinitesimal part of that Universe. It may be that we go out on a clear summer night and, taking a glance upward, let our imaginations play with what smattering of astronomy we possess on what we see there. The light from that star

left it something over a hundred thousand years ago, has been travelling at the rate of 186,000 miles a second ever since, and has just reached the earth. For all we know, that star may have ceased to exist thousands of years before our first ancestor appeared on the earth, but its light is just coming to us. And yet that star, visible to the naked eye, is on the hither fringes of the Universe; a telescope would reveal millions on millions of stars unseen by us, stretching ten times as far again into space. But the most powerful telescope is significant not so much for what it discovers as for the hints it gives us of Universes yet undiscovered. Here are you and I, imperceptible minutiae on an infinitesimal dust spot in a far-off corner of an ocean of space. What do you make of it all?

But that is only part of the story. Eighteen or twenty or twenty-two years lie behind each of us. Fifty, even sixty, years may lie ahead. But behind our birth there stretches a range of time which no human mind can grasp—2,000,000 years, at least, the biologists tell us, this human species of ours has existed—and, ahead, time of equal length. Here is our life, sixty or seventy or eighty years which seem to us to hold infinite significance, placed at a point in that long stream of existence—somewhat less than the wink of an eye in an eternity of time. What do you make of it all? The mind which does not ask some explanation is unintelligent.

But it may be that we have not yet been gripped by the mystery of the Universe. It may be that some glorious view of nature for the first time reveals to us the inner meaning of beauty. Possibly we "discover" poetry for the first time and awake to the realization that there are ranges on ranges of experience hitherto unknown to us. Or the life of the world about us may seem suddenly to

have become incredibly more complex, a maze of relations and movements and conflicting motives, impossible to understand or to influence. And before it all a sense of loneliness and wonder steals over us. To become conscious of all this is to have rise in the mind the questions, "Where do they come from—this Universe, life? Where are they going to? What does it all mean?"

It is not only the world without which is growing daily more complex and confusing. We fool ourselves if we think that is the real trouble. We look out through the lenses of our own experience upon a landscape which seems topsy-turvy. It appears so, partly at least, because the lenses are out of focus. It is the life within which is becoming infinitely more complex and confusing. It is more difficult than it used to be to understand ourselves. It is more difficult to manage ourselves. It is more difficult to know what we believe. It is more difficult to be certain where we fit into the whole business. And there begins to creep into our thinking a questioning which is likely to increase as the next few years come on—what is the purpose and meaning of our life anyhow? Our minds are seeking an interpretation.

It may be that all of this is Greek to you, outside the range of your present experience. "*If our minds are alive*"—ah, that's it! The human mind, *when it is alive*, when it is set free to follow its own highest impulses in a Universe of mystery and a world of confusion, seeks some understanding of itself and of the environment in which it finds itself. If these questions and their like do not relentlessly press upon you, it is because your mind is not yet really alive. For the questions "Whence? What? Whither? How? Why?" must always be the basic and ultimate questions of life—not because the phil-

osophers have ruled it so but because they are rooted deep in man's instinctive mentality. They demand an answer. Life which is real is a unity. We cannot be whole human beings and go on living our practical day-by-day life while there go unanswered the great queries which would make life intelligent. Our life cannot be full and healthy, let alone consistent, while that part of it which should give it direction goes unsatisfied. And so, while religion never begins or ends in intellectual inquiry, no living and active mind can be satisfied until it rests in an adequate explanation of life's meaning.

2. But there is something more than the craving of the mind for interpretation; that is less than half the story. Indeed, when we examine these lives of ours, we discover that that is only the mind's part in the dissatisfaction of the whole life, *the craving of the whole life for completion*. That dissatisfaction, if we are truly alive, every one of us has felt. That is really the meaning of the restlessness which is unquestionably the most outstanding characteristic of the younger generation today and which, to a greater or less degree, has affected the life of every one of us. It is a dissatisfaction with life as it is—with the old shibboleths and the old objectives and the old conventions. The cry is for a number of things—for reality, for freedom, for self-expression, for self-realization. It is, really, a sensing that there is more in life than we have yet laid hold of, than people today are laying hold of. It is a craving for something which we call by this same name—life—although we do not know exactly what we mean. We cannot describe it and we cannot define it; but we are certain it is there, and we are sure we shall recognize it when we meet it. It is the inarticulate reaching out of all

that is best within us for that "something more." Youth's restlessness today is life's instinctive desire for completion.

It comes to us in many different ways—this craving for completion. With a few, it is the sense of solitude of spirit of which we spoke above. With some, it is more nearly a sense of aimlessness; possibly the final determination of our lifework approaches and we are uncertain where we fit in; we sense no particular meaning in life. With some, it is the realization of powerlessness; defeat in moral battles, possibly; the inability to handle our own lives. To some of us, a large factor in it has been the discovery that we could not help one or two desperately needy friends. With many, it is a gradual realization that our lives are stunted and poor, that those who live fully possess a richness and a depth and a joy unknown to us. It is an awakening to a consciousness of destiny—that life was made for something great and full and triumphant, and that it is not really life at all until that is attained.

That is the deeper meaning of our search for explanation. What our lives crave is not so much an interpretation of life to which the mind can give a confident assent (although we want that) as a program for life which can bring to it fullness and meaning. Intellectual explanation alone never wholly satisfies. Life's deepest need is not explanation, but power. Life's most urgent question is not "What?" but "How?" We often think we want to know what we should be and do; really, we want to know how we can be and do what we know we ought to.

The mind's desire for explanation, the life's desire for completion—these, then, are the two basic facts of life. Light on the mystery of life, power for the mastery of life—these are what we want. It is precisely these two

things which men through the centuries have sought of religion. For religion is not a sense of beauty, as when one sees a gorgeous sunset or hears great music or is awed by the contemplation of the heavens. Religion is not an emotional experience, a certain inner feeling of peace or joy or exaltation which comes at moments of high inspiration. Religion is not absorption in a task, whatever it may be, as when we say of a man, "His work is his religion" or "Golf is his religion." Religion is not friendship, an intimate and inspiring companionship with others. Religion is no subscription to a creed or formula, no membership in an organization. Religion is not even good intentions, high moral purpose, a kindly spirit. Religion is the reaching out of one's whole life—mind, body, spirit, emotions, intuitions, affections, will—for completion, for inner unity, for true relation with those about it, for true relation to the Universe in which one lives. Religion is life, a certain kind of life, a life of harmony within and true adjustment without—true adjustment, therefore, with the life of God Himself.

Do you see that, if this interpretation of religion be correct, at least three things inevitably follow?

1. *Religion is by the very nature of life instinctive, intuitive.* We are religious because we cannot help ourselves. Interest in religion, then, is no impersonal, academic discussion, artificially stimulated and sustained. It is the rising to the surface of inextinguishable desires inherent in life itself. The experience of religion is no fifth wheel, no plastering onto life of a creed or form or unreal experience. It is the coming of life to its own fulfillment, as natural and inevitable as the leafing of the trees in spring or the cry of a new-born child for food.

2. *Religion is the central concern of life*, because religion is the fulfillment of life. Some answer to the religious questions, both in the realm of our thinking and in the realm of our living, we must have. Religion may be untrue; it may be dangerously false. But, whatever else you may say about it, religion is not unimportant; it is the most important problem of life.

3. *Religion is concerned primarily not with our minds but with the whole of life*. For our "philosophy of life" is our interpretation of the *whole* of our experience, and that whole is a multifold thing to which every aspect of our beings contributes. Religion, therefore, is no arid intellectual matter but an active, vital thing into which our wills enter—involving our response to all the experience life brings to us. In our whole inquiry, the theoretical and the practical must be inextricably intermixed. If we find God, we must find Him with our whole beings. And the conception of Him and the conception of the good life which our minds formulate must be the conceptions to which our whole experience leads us.

There is a homely old proverb, "Turn a horse loose and he will return to his stall; turn a man's soul loose and it will return home, it will return to God." The great spirits down the centuries have sensed that. Two of the greatest have made it the summation of their own experience of life: "God that made the world and all things therein has made of one blood all nations of men that they should seek Him if by chance they might feel after Him and find Him."² "God has made us for Himself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Him."³

² Paul, Acts 17:24-27.

³ Augustine, "Confessions."

THE MEANING OF LIFE

CHAPTER II

THE CONDITIONS OF THE QUEST

It is a fundamental principle for the discovery of truth in any realm whatsoever that there are certain prior conditions to be met. This is true in science. The chemist who is searching out some new discovery must first set up an apparatus which may require days for its assembling. He must possess what we sometimes call background, a thorough knowledge of what pathfinders who have preceded him have discovered and of all that is now to be known in the field of his experimentation. Then he must create the particular conditions of his own hypothesis—the precise mixture of chemicals, the exact temperature, the required atmospheric conditions, and whatever else is necessary. Finally, in many and many a case, certain faculties which we are inclined to regard as the antithesis of scientific—imagination, intuition, etc.,—have pioneered the way long before his experiment began. Someone has said that scientific discovery is a process in which imagination, intuition, and faith leap far ahead of the facts and grasp truth; then a foundation of facts to support the hypothesis is gradually erected.¹ We sometimes talk glibly as though truth lay about like stray shells on a sandy beach, to be picked up for the seeking. But truth, like anything of value, is dearly bought. She admits to the vision of her presence only those who have fulfilled to the last iota the

¹ See, for example, Poincaré, "*Science et Méthode*," Chap. 3.

conditions she herself has laid down for entrance—conditions not only of mind or of skill but also of character—toil, patience, courage, consecration, faith.

Indeed, a large part of the discovery of truth itself is the discovery and fulfilling of these prior conditions. A few years ago, announcement was made of an invention which revolutionized the radio industry and which has made possible the present popularization of radio. The inventor, a quiet, diffident little man, who for twenty years had eked out a scanty existence as professor in an eastern technical school, became a multimillionaire overnight. The story of his invention is not known. He experimented with no apparatus to achieve it. For days and weeks and months, he sat quietly over a writing pad, filling sheet after sheet with figures, scratching, correcting, tearing up, and starting afresh. When his mathematical formula was finally completed, the apparatus was set up. It worked perfectly at once. He had discovered and fulfilled the prior conditions; the truth was immediately revealed.

In no sphere of truth is this principle so important as in the ultimate truths about life. How inevitable that is! For here we are dealing with the most delicate and important of all types of truth, that which in a sense includes and yet transcends all the others. If only we had common sense to see ourselves in perspective, how ridiculous many of our assumptions would appear—the assumption, for instance, that the great truths about life should be so obvious that anyone at any time could read them. As a matter of fact, many of our intellectual difficulties and most of our practical difficulties about life arise just here—we never fulfill the conditions through which alone truth could certainly appear to us. I recall a girl in a

college in Kansas who had committed some terrible offense against her own conscience, something so horrible to her that she could tell it to no one. She had made no confession of it, no effort to clear her own mind about it, yet she was complaining, "I have waited and waited to have God become a reality to me. Why doesn't He make Himself real to me?" Many of us more or less echo that same complaint. "God isn't real to me. This business of religion is all Greek to me," we say. How could it be otherwise? We have not fulfilled the conditions under which any living Spirit of Love could make itself felt in our lives.

But that is to state it negatively only. I want to state positively the belief that, if we discover and fulfill the inevitable conditions of our quest, truth will in the end of the day reveal itself to us with unmistakable certainty. It will be no clear and unwavering vision. Truth is always difficult to hold. We must fight ever for our vision of it; that, indeed, is one of the conditions of possessing it. God has not written Himself across the face of the Universe so that he who runs may read. But neither is He playing a capricious hide-and-seek with those who earnestly search for Him. And I believe that, granting the fluctuations and uncertainties which are not absent from the experience of the best of men, even Jesus himself, truth does eventually and satisfyingly appear to those who so fit themselves to see it.

What, then, are the conditions for the discovery of the truth about life, for the discovery of God, and the coming into intimate relationship with Him?

I. The first is that which must apply to every field of discovery—a *knowledge and equipment adequate to the*

task. This is as true for the seeker after God as it is for the chemist. Yet people think they can embark on this preeminently difficult and delicate task with no equipment save good intentions, and find the truth they seek. As Dr. Douglas Adam has said, "With some, doubt is an attitude of intellectual adventure, with quite inadequate mental equipment for the experiment."² In this realm, since it is a philosophy of life we are seeking, the *knowledge* needed, the material for our work, is an adequate experience of life—an experience won through our own lives or through intimate acquaintance with the experience of others. I remember my own intellectual difficulties about religion when I was an undergraduate. I realize now that there was not enough knowledge of life there to have intellectual difficulties about. They were theoretical, unreal, childish. It is only in the face of the facts of life in all their cruelty and mystery that true doubt comes. Too often in the field of religious thought, the seeker is like a child trying to construct the Brooklyn Bridge with his toy blocks, or searching out the secrets of the heavens with a magnifying glass.

And in this realm *equipment adequate to the task* is a mind able and sufficiently trained to grapple with the intricate problems involved. This does not mean that only the intellectually acute can understand life or discover its secrets, for it is of the very essence of spiritual truth that it reveals itself to the humble and the simple minded. It does mean that only those who possess the needed equipment had best dally with the intellectual and philosophical problems of religion.

2. A second condition which follows closely was referred to in the first chapter—the recognition that *truth is not*

² John Douglas Adam, "Under the Highest Leadership," p. 4.

the discovery of the mind alone, but of the whole personality. For truth concerns the whole of life and the whole of life is a unity. Truth, therefore, must be our best interpretation of the evidence and experience which all of life brings. We must realize that all the organs of our nature when they are functioning fully are feeling after truth and leading toward truth—that mysterious and baffling faculty which we call intuition; our emotions at their highest; the sense of beauty; our wills; most of all, our sense of right and wrong, our moral valuations, the way our natures react to definite issues and choices which present themselves.

Here is one reason why religion is so unreal to many people. They are seeking God with their minds alone. How unreasonable that is! If the mind were the final means of discovering God, then religion would become the prerogative of the intellectually gifted.³ And that would be blasphemy against God Himself. As Bushnell once said, "The geometer might as well expect to solve his problems by the function of smell as a responsible soul to find God by the understanding alone."⁴ Yet many of us persist in attempting just that. And this tendency to seek God with the mind alone is a characteristically modern trait. In this day when we are ridding ourselves of fragmented conceptions of life and when the great cry is, "Life is a unity; it cannot be parcelled out into mind, body, spirit, etc.," we still try to search with only our minds in this field of truth-seeking which so preeminently involves life as a whole. Truth never comes to us fully that way.

³ "If the mind were the final means of apprehending God, we should be reduced at once to the position of Cicero with reference to the Roman religion—that only the intellectually gifted can be saved." Henry B. Wright, "The Will of God and a Man's Life-work," p. 124.

⁴ Horace Bushnell, "The New Life," p. 182.

There is one further fact to be recognized about the nature of truth itself. Not only is it to be found only by the whole personality; it is of the very nature of truth that *it reveals itself one step at a time, and the second step never appears until the first has been taken*. That does not suit us. We want to know the whole story before we begin. We want to see the end of the path before we start. This is especially true with regard to our careers. We say in effect, "Show me precisely where this path will land me, and I'll tell you whether I'll take it. Tell me beforehand what You expect me to do if I agree to do Your will, and I'll tell You whether I'll agree to do it." Truth does not work that way. There is great insight in that line of John Henry Newman's *Lead, Kindly Light*, "I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me." If truth seems a puzzling blur to you, ask yourself the question, "Have I taken the few steps of duty already clear to me?" The light you seek may wait for that; for the quest of truth is an adventure, an adventure in which we move forward step by step. Remember, too, that *to face truth or duty and dodge it, to see a step and fail to take it, is never to see that step quite so clearly again*.

3. Further, no discovery of truth is possible without *the determination to push through to an answer at whatever cost*. The search for truth is a struggle; no one has a right to embark on it unless he is determined to see his search through to the end, cost what it may. "God's way with life from the amœba to man has never been to fulfill desire but to tempt to effort. From the dawn of history God's way with man has not been to instruct but to tempt to discovery. We should not expect the most important of all truth spread out like an advertisement, but hidden

as a treasure.”⁵ There is no room for intellectual dilly-dallying here. This is the condition of *mental earnestness*.

4. Finally, there is one other and far more fundamental condition, a condition which few of us recognize today and yet without which the search for truth must be wholly in vain. It is the condition of *moral earnestness—the willingness to remold your life in accordance with the truth discovered*.

For truth, as we have said, is a rare flower, the supremely delicate thing life holds. Friendship at its deepest, another rare flower, never wittingly reveals itself unless it is certain of response, appreciation, and reciprocity from the friend. To do so would be gross desecration of one of life's glorious gifts. There must be an attunement of life with life before there can be true friendship. So it should be with anything truly noble or good or beautiful. Have you ever stood before a great painting and heard a stupid tourist make a disparaging remark about one of the world's masterpieces? To the person with a sense for the beautiful it seems that the painting should have been screened from those who cannot appreciate it. So, too, when one sees a pure child in a circle of coarse and cursing men, one feels that the child should be screened from coarseness which will not understand nor respect his fineness. So supremely is it with truth. It is possessed of an instinctive reticence which is laid aside only for those whose lives are attuned to it, those who “have eyes to see.”

But there is more in it than that. While truth is a thing of beauty and screens itself from those who cannot or will not appreciate it, truth has a characteristic even more fundamental and distinctive. Every bit of it, wherever you

⁵ Lily Dougal, “The Lord of Thought,” p. 9.

meet it, is charged with moral meaning and moral implications, implications for the conduct of your own life. Truth is not something to be observed and enjoyed; it is something to be seen and acted upon. If you should discover that it is true that the pure in heart see God, there falls on you an immediate obligation to make your life pure. If you should discover that this world of ours can go forward only through the willingness of men to lose their lives for it, there falls on you an immediate obligation to throw your life wholly into that great task. No glimpse of truth without a corresponding implication for life! And the corollary of this is obvious. No one discovers truth in its fullness unless he pledges himself to remold his whole life in accordance with the truth discovered.⁶ And he must pledge himself in advance.

But one's attitude must go even beyond that. Not only willingness to meet the implications of the truth discovered, but determination, eagerness so to remold life. Not only moral honesty, but moral earnestness—an eagerness to throw one's whole life wherever truth points, at whatever cost to oneself and family and career, at whatever sacrifice of old habits and deep prejudices and long-cherished plans. One of the noblest and wittiest Christians I know says with regard to his call to the ministry that when he was in college he expected God to come across the Princeton campus and, standing beneath his window, yell up, "John McDowell, stick your head out. I want you to go into the Christian ministry." Small wonder the call never came. That is the way many of us face the decision of our lifework. And thus do many of us face truth. Moral earnestness is the inescapable condi-

⁶ "It is probably impossible to reason an intellectually alert but morally frivolous man into belief in God." A. E. Taylor, "Encyclopedia Britannica," vol. 31, p. 98.

tion for discovering truth. "He who *wills* to do God's will shall know." ⁷

So the laying hold of the truth about life is fully as much a matter of moral attunement as of intellectual perception; it is the moral harmonizing of life with the life of God Himself. How could it be otherwise? If it be true that through this vast fabric of human life there runs a thread of purpose which gives to all else its purpose and its meaning, then only those who share that purpose could possibly understand life's meaning. If there stands at the very center of the Universe a God of love, then only those who see life through the eyes of love and in the spirit of love can possibly see it aright. As surely as the wave length of the radio must be properly adjusted to the message to be received, so only he whose heart beats in unison with God's can be sure of the heart beat of the Great Companion. People without moral purpose or sense of moral responsibility say, "I can't know God." "Heavens, man, how could you? You never really know me as friend unless you share my great purposes. How much more true of God!"

Life is a moral challenge—a challenge to be done once and for all with petty shams and petty prides, with intellectual egotism and social extravagance and moral indifference—a challenge to see life as a great struggle, and to resolve to spend and be spent in that struggle; a struggle that men and women and little children shall find life, and that what we call the Kingdom of God on earth may come. To those who accept that challenge, truth and God are increasingly revealed.

⁷ John 7:17. Cf. also "My son, keep your spirit always in such a state as to desire that there be a God, and you will never doubt it." Rousseau.

CHAPTER III

THE AUTHOR OF LIFE—GOD

Our task is the quest for the meaning of life. We recognize that there are certain conditions to be met by the true seeker before his undertaking can be successfully pursued. And now, let us suppose that we have honestly fulfilled to the best of our ability the conditions in the quest of life's meaning. Where shall we begin our inquiry?

We must begin with the facts of the Universe in which we live. For the primary factor in human experience is not a man's own consciousness; it is not his social relationship to our fellow men. The primary factor in human experience ever has been and ever will be the physical Universe. Historically, we are not born into consciousness, we are not born into social relationships; both are relatively late appearances in the history of the individual and of the race. We are born into *a world* which in a vital sense is our ancestor, out of whose inanimate structure has come animate life, out of whose animate life has come human life; a world which supported us (as individuals and as a race) during the tedious period before birth and which made our birth possible; a world whose silent but dependable orderliness and receptivity alone make our present life possible; a world to which we owe our existence and upon which we are dependent for our continuance at every moment. Countless millenniums before man

was prefigured in the amoeba the Universe was living out its old age; countless millenniums after the dust has cleared from man's brief scurry on this planet the Universe will be in the heyday of its early youth. Which is simply a graphic way of saying that, in comparison with the Universe in which he finds himself, man is as nothing, absolutely nothing. Any theory about life which would make pretense of being a philosophy must start its inquiry here and nowhere else—with the question of the Universe. Whence comes it? Whither goes it? What meaning, if any, can be found in it? Beside these queries, the questions of man's existence, his destiny, his petty problems in the year of grace 1930 fade into insignificance. If only we had perspective to see it so, the great question for the human mind is not, "What think ye of man?" It is, "What think ye of this vast and mysterious colossus of which man is the creature, and an inconceivably insignificant creature at that?" A philosophy without an answer to these deeper questions is like an attempt to throw a bridge across a river without laying a base on either bank. If we must be agnostic here, then we must be agnostic throughout. If the primary fact of life reveals no meaning, then how shall we find meaning in all the rest constructed on that fact?

And when we examine this Universe of ours, what can we say about it? Three things, at least. It manifests three fundamental characteristics:¹

1. *Inconceivable magnitude.* The astronomers tell us that if a train were to travel continuously at the rate of a mile a minute into space, in 40,000,000 years it would

¹ For the suggestion of this threefold description of the nature of the Universe, I am indebted to Professor Henry Norris Russell of Princeton University.

reach the *nearest* star. But the telescopes have recently discovered a nebula at such a distance that light travelling at 186,000 miles a second takes at least 930,000 years to reach our earth. That is not the limit of the Universe; it is simply the farthest star which our telescopes have yet revealed. That is the Universe in which we live; what do you make of it? Inconceivable magnitude, first.

2. *Incredible complexity.* The vastness of the Universe is only one side of the picture. Corresponding to the world of the telescope is the world of the microscope. You know that when a snowflake falls on a warm pavement and melts, more molecular changes take place in that instant than all the movements of all the troops in all the armies in the Great War. You know that in a single common steel pin there are so many electrons in incessant motion that the human race in a million years could not count them, yet in comparison with their size they are as far apart as the planets of the solar system. That is the Universe in which we live; what do you make of it? Incredible complexity, second.

3. *Absolute orderliness.* Do you recall that at the time of the solar eclipse a few years ago, the moon was a fraction of a minute late in crossing the sun? It troubled the astronomers greatly, not because the moon was late (for the moon is always late), but because the reason for its tardiness had not yet been discovered. It was no exception to the orderliness of the Universe, but simply a gap in our knowledge of that orderliness. We were told in advance the precise moment to a fraction of a second and the precise spot to the fraction of an inch on the sidewalks of New York City where the shadow of the total eclipse would fall; and at the precise moment and the precise spot, the shadow fell. It is possible to predict now with

infinitesimal exactitude the time when certain comets will reappear within the earth's vision thousands of years hence. And, were it possible for us to return to the earth on the appointed day, we may be sure the comet would reappear on schedule. Absolute orderliness.

That is the Universe in which we live. What do you make of it? Shall we say that behind it there is—nothing? There is nothing else with which our human minds are familiar which presents these same characteristics of *size*, *complexity*, *orderliness* which does not have behind it—mind. Logically there can be only one answer as to what lies behind this vast first fact of experience which so pre-eminently is characterized by size, complexity, order—*Mind*. The story is told of an inventor who, although himself a believer in God, belonged to a circle of agnostic scientists. He had perfected a very marvellous and intricate invention. He invited his friends to dinner to show them his new toy. As dinner was announced, the curtains into the dining room were drawn and on the center of the table was seen the new mechanism, marvellous in its intricacy, moving in bewildering revolutions and convolutions with no apparent source of locomotion. For a moment the guests stood aghast, and then one of them, one of the most blatantly agnostic as it happened, gasped, "Who made it?" And the inventor with a smile replied, "Chance!" It is far more logical to suppose that the highest product of man's inventive genius is the result of chance than to suppose that the Universe is anything other than the product of infinite Mind.

Much is still made of the supposed conflict between science and religion. It should be said that it is the sheer facts of modern science which have driven many of us to belief in God. We are rapidly entering into the day when

the strongest *intellectual* support for the Christian conception of God is to be found through science. If modern science has done one thing, it has reëchoed with multiplied meaning the psalmist's word, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork. . . . When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?"²

Many, I know, will think this an unwarranted emphasis upon the physical Universe, upon cosmology; but I do not think so. The point of it is not primarily to establish a belief in God, but to throw into perspective man's true place in the Universe and the significance of his problem. For the starting point in the discovery of truth is genuine humility—not the humility of a pious superstition but the humility of a comprehensive and intelligent view of the Universe in which we live. Nothing but the most consummate and childish egotism has led us to consider the Universe anthropocentric. If there is one hypothesis which is *a priori* incredible (one might almost say ludicrous), it is that man is the summit of creation. We shall not get far until we come to that realization. I recall the remark of a brilliant but supercilious undergraduate in one of our most famous eastern women's colleges—a college which considers itself quite without a peer intellectually and which, I fear, tends to look with kindly condescension upon poor simple-minded religious folk: "All that you say about religion would be true if one were able to believe in a personal God; but, of course, *I* can't believe in a personal God." One suspects that He in whose hand the Universes describe their courses without effort must experience no

² Psalm 19:1; Psalm 8:3, 4.

little amusement at the "imperceptible minutia on an infinitesimal dust spot in a far-off corner of an ocean of space" who sets herself up as the master of it all. One is grateful for a possible quality in God corresponding to a sense of humor. There can be no understanding of the meaning of life which does not begin, as it must end, in humility and reverence.

It does, none the less, give us the *fact* of God—this study of our Universe. It tells us that behind the creation of which we ourselves are the creatures there can be one thing and one thing only—infinite Mind. But thus far it has told us nothing about the nature of that Mind. Is it a vast cold Reason, impersonal, indifferent, fatalistic? Or is it, as some men have said, cruel, malicious, vindictive, making of man and all his efforts a sport and plaything, allowing him the semblance of freedom in order to tantalize him all the more when he discovers his freedom is an illusion? Or is it a great, impenetrable Power which is working for good but is hidden from us behind His majesty and transcendence—like the head of a great corporation secluded behind row on row of private secretaries? Or is He, by chance, what Jesus thought Him to be—one whom we describe best when we call Him Father, closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet, One who is really ever more ready to hear than we to pray?

It seems a terrific leap of faith—to believe that the Originator and Controller of this Universe is indeed a loving Friend. Is it not just here that most of us find our practical stumbling block? We cannot quite imagine how He "in whose hand the Universes describe their courses without effort" can be able or care to hear the petty prayer of each human life—far more, to enter into personal and peculiar friendship with that life. Let us be clear, how-

ever, that we do not face this difficulty because such a God is logically improbable. Quite the reverse. It is not a leap of faith but of imagination we need. As Doctor Fosdick has said, "No man can think through the meaning of belief in God without coming to the faith of the Bible in the individual knowledge, love, and purpose of God for each of us. Purpose for the Universe and purpose for each life are two aspects of the same thing and they mutually involve each other. Not strong reason but weak imagination leads us to be terrified by the mere size of the Universe into the thought that God cannot care for us. So far as physical nature has any testimony to bear on the matter at all, she says, 'There is nothing too great for the Creator to accomplish, and nothing too small for Him to attend to.'"³ Augustine's prayer is correct, "O Thou who carest for everyone of us as if Thou carest for him alone; and for us all as if we were but one."⁴ Our difficulties are not in the logic of the facts; they are the ever harassing difficulties of a finite human mind seeking to grasp infinity.

But what evidence have we that the God of the Universe *is* the kind of Person Christians have always believed in, the kind of Person Jesus believed in? What can we learn concerning the nature of God?

Here again we turn first of all to Nature herself. We have not told all that the Universe teaches us. Science no longer stops by telling us that there is a Mind behind it all. It tells us that Nature can be seen to be working for a purpose, a purpose which is discerned most clearly, perhaps, in evolution (that great evidence for God which some have sought to make religion's enemy). And that

³ Harry Emerson Fosdick, "The Meaning of Prayer," pp. 48, 52.

⁴ Augustine, "Confessions," p. 47.

Purpose is definitely moral ; it is working to make triumph precisely those same qualities which men recognize as highest—altruism, cooperation, self-sacrifice. How may we be sure of this? Because Nature stamps with her unmistakable approval those animals and men who rise to the highest moral stature.⁵ This is the conclusion of Professor J. Arthur Thomson, one of the greatest living scientists, "As man's conceived purpose transcends the mammal's perceived purpose, as that in turn transcends the ingrained or organized purposiveness of the lower animals, so, but much more, will the Divine Purpose transcend our highest thoughts of it. But we deem that if we err in using the word Purpose—the biggest word we have—we err less grievously than if we used no word at all."⁶ And because this Purpose is striving to develop personalities and especially personalities which embody the quality of love, we must believe (so these scientists tell us) that the God who stands half-hidden behind the Purpose which we so clearly see must Himself be at least a Personality, a Personality of love.

We need not look to Nature alone. Corresponding to those who have studied her and tried to fathom what of surety she tells us about God are those who have studied history to read her lessons. Their evidence lies along a wholly different path ; but, as we gaze down it, it points to identically the same end. Its conclusion is that behind the agelong development of human history there can be discerned a Mind, a Purpose—a Purpose which reaches its culmination in the appearance of human personality at

⁵ "Nature stamps not only the beautiful but the other-regarding with the only approval which is hers to bestow—success in surviving." J. Arthur Thomson, "The System of Animate Nature," p. 639.

⁶ J. Arthur Thomson, "The System of Animate Nature," p. 643.

its best, in love. "The eternal operation of a Mind which employs Power but is ruled by character."⁷ That is the philosopher's way of saying, "a God of love." Or, in the words of another of the foremost modern philosophers, "For a metaphysic which has emancipated itself from physical categories, the ultimate conception of God is not that of a preexistent Creator but, as it is for religion, that of the eternal Redeemer of the World."⁸

But all this evidence may not satisfy you. It is true, all of it. Let no one persuade you that the Christian faith in God cannot stand on its own feet intellectually. There are perplexities in it. It is not so unmistakable that we can maintain it unquestioned without effort. If it were, we should despise it, for it would not be worth the holding. But the best evidence from the Universe, from science, from Nature, from history converge to tell us that the Loving Father of Jesus' faith is the most probable hypothesis which all knowledge can give us. Still you are not satisfied. Such an argument may send you forth intellectually confident in the reasonableness of your belief. But it does not bring you closer to God, sending you forth more eagerly to develop friendship with Him in prayer and work. And so I wish to point out still another pathway to our belief in God—the evidence of human lives.

Bishop Woodcock tells us of a college professor who had been a notorious atheist but who, after his wife's death, became a deeply religious man. This was his explanation, "I used to argue with my wife and my arguments completely baffled her until she could say nothing. But she would live with me and her life completely baffled me until I could say nothing." In his beautiful biography of

⁷ L. T. Hobhouse, "Development and Purpose."

⁸ A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, "The Idea of God in Modern Philosophy," p. 411.

his wife, the British Prime Minister, Ramsey MacDonald, has this description of Margaret MacDonald, "The awe of the eternal was never out of her mind, the love of Christ guided every step she took, her work was one continual sacrifice, one continued prayer. She saw spirit in everything. The whole of creation was a moral effort striving and dreaming towards a perfect beauty and a perfect love. Her soul was the world's soul. She knew the destiny of the world from what she herself aspired to reach."⁹ Small wonder that a friend wrote of her after her death, "She believed in us all, and so she could make diamonds out of dust."¹⁰ Men saw her; they believed in God. You recall the experience of the young man who went to Phillips Brooks to present an intellectual problem and forgot to ask it. As he came away, exultant, he said, "I did not care. I had found out that what I needed was not the solution of a special problem, but the contagion of a triumphant spirit."¹¹

A friend of mine recently completed a theological book on the nature of God. It is a purely philosophical, technical discussion. But in it he wrote this dedication: "To my mother—one who though knowing no theology yet makes belief in God inevitable." Ah, exactly. With our minds, we believe in God because of the arguments which knowledge brings us. In our lives, we dare to seek God largely because of the irrefutable proof of Him which shines on us through the faces of men and women, and supremely through the face of Jesus. We need more of those of whom this could be said—who in our day reveal God through the sheer evidence of a human life. But we need more, too, of those who can read such evidence when

⁹ J. Ramsey MacDonald, "Margaret MacDonald," p. 54.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 204.

¹¹ Harry Emerson Fosdick, "The Meaning of Service," p. 215.

it confronts them—who, sensing the presence of the divine concealed in some human life, can pierce behind and beyond it into living touch with God Himself.

But I seem to hear someone say, "That is pure sentimentalism. A typical religious argument, it jumps from certain facts about human nature to a theory about the nature of God. It begs the question of whether we have any *right* to believe in a God of love merely because we see men of love." Not at all. There is sound philosophic ground why we should trust this evidence from human life. It is putting our belief in God to the highest and the final rational test—the pragmatic test, the test of its result in human life. Since (as we have repeatedly said) truth is an active, dynamic thing, concerned vitally with the living of life—no intellectual conviction or philosophic abstraction—then we must look to the test in life to show us what theory of life is true.

For science, history, philosophy—everything—prove to us that our Universe is rational, reasonable, at least. If that be so, then theories of truth can be put to this practical test. In a rational Universe, that theory concerning life is true which, when it is lived out most consistently, produces life recognized as the highest we know. The correct key is the key which turns the lock; the truest philosophy is the philosophy which produces the best life. If the Universe is a meaningless, materialistic mechanism grinding out its deterministic way, we would suppose that those who live most consistently on that theory would live best; the facts of the Universe would respond to their theory and vindicate it. If the Universe is rational, but cold and morally indifferent, then we would suppose that those who live most consistently on that theory would find the greatest response from it, would commend themselves

to us as having lived best—most successfully, most happily. But if the Universe is the handiwork of a great moral Spirit, one who is infinitely more moral and infinitely more loving as he is infinitely greater than we, one who is best described as Father; if it be true that there is written into the heart of the Universe itself a way of saving people through sacrifice (what we call the principle of the Cross); if it be true that one is to find his life by losing it—then we would suppose that to him who lived this belief most consistently, the Universe would rise up in response. It would vindicate his theory. To his key the lock would click.

And so it does. When all is said and done, few of us would deny that, ultimately, those who have lived closest to Christ have found the fullest life, the noblest life, the life which discovered in the Universe the strongest support rising up to justify and confirm it. Few would deny that whatever else we may say of him and think of him, Christ appeals to us as the one who found and lived life supremely. He said that he who loses his life finds it. It is true not because he said it, but because down through the centuries the best of men have always conceded that those of their fellows who lost their lives found them and because he did it himself. He said that the Cross stands at the center of life and of history. It is true not because he said it, but because ever since to those who have dared to live under the shadow of the Cross and in its spirit, life has responded with power to save others and ultimate inner satisfaction for themselves. He said we were to believe in God as a Father of infinite compassion and love. It is true not because he said it, but because in his own life it evidenced its truth; because to him who alone dared to believe it and live it wholly, life and the Universe

responded by making of his life and character the supreme moral fact of history, the fact before which men who deny his faith and call him fool bow down in reverence and adoration. To his key the lock clicked.

That is why, philosophically as well as practically, the only final and ultimately convincing proof of the truth of Christianity is a Christian, supremely Christ himself. That is why the instinct is true which tells us that we have proof of God in human character—the philosopher through his wife, her friends through Margaret MacDonald, the young skeptic through Phillips Brooks, my friend through his mother. That is why we feel the compulsion to trust the evidence of lives against the argument of the philosophers. As Coleridge once said, “My head was with Spinoza; but my heart was with Peter and John.” In a philosophy of living, the ultimate test of theory must be the results of its practice in life.

How, then, shall we think of God? A God who is intelligent? Yes, because the world of Nature tells us that behind and through the Universe we find unmistakable evidence of Mind. A God of moral purpose? Yes, because science and our study of history tell us that that Mind is working toward a Purpose and that that Purpose is moral; ultimately the Universe supports and substantiates moral values. A God who is personal? Yes, because the supreme end of that moral Purpose, as far as we have knowledge of it, is the creation of human personalities in which the spirit of transforming love is dominant; personalities of which the transcendent example in all history is Jesus Christ. God cannot be less than the best of His creation. He must be that and infinitely more. A God who is at least personal—you may call Him super-

personal or suprapersonal if you will. And so we think of Him most truly when we think of Him as a loving Personality, when we think of Him as the nature and the spirit which we see in Jesus lifted into the fullness of the eternal and infinite God. We may and must call Him "Father," not because that is a wholly adequate designation, but because it is the best we have. Doctor Jacks describes Him thus, "That in the world which responds to the confidence of those who trust it, declaring itself to them as a fellowworker in the pursuit of Eternal Values, meeting their loyalty to it with reciprocal loyalty to them, and coming at critical moments when the need of its sympathy is greatest; the conclusion being that wherever there is a soul in darkness, obstruction, or misery, there also is a Power which can help, deliver, illuminate, and gladden that soul. This is the Helper of men, sharing their business as Creators of Value, nearest at hand when the worst has to be encountered, the companion of the brave, the upholder of the loyal, the friend of the lover, the healer of the broken, the joy of the victorious—the God who is Spirit, the God who is Love."¹²

He is a God beside whose wisdom the deepest thinking of all the ages, the profoundest knowledge of modern science, is as the troubled effort of a baby trying to place his wooden blocks end to end; a God beside whose love the purest flower of human affection and faith and sacrifice (and they are the noblest products of man's life) are as the rude playfulness of puppies in the spring; a God who could, if He desired, transform in a moment of time this tattered and harassed and perplexed world of ours into the image of His own beauty, but who will not, out of respect for you and me—very much as you and I would

¹² L. P. Jacks, "Religious Perplexities," p. 60.

not do for our children what it is better for them to learn to do for themselves; yet a God who yearns for us and for the world with a compassion beyond comprehension and who shares with us every experience of suffering and failure and disgrace besides the suffering of His own heart for our stupidity and wilfulness; a God to whom we owe all that we have of life, of beauty, of truth, of love, and who asks of us in return merely that we shall be ourselves, that we shall live as men, that we shall live as potentially He made us—sons and daughters of God. And the meaning of life? To know Him and to work in fellowship with Him—that is life.

CHAPTER IV

THE MASTER OF LIFE—JESUS

If we were to study the place which Jesus holds in the life of our world today, two facts would impress us.

First, men today, possibly more than at any time in all history, are interested in the man, Jesus Christ. Ten years ago in student circles, it was not considered either respectable or interesting to talk about Jesus except in a religious meeting or a summer conference. If someone were so foolish as to mention his name at a dinner table or before a fraternity-house fire, an embarrassed and annoyed silence fell on the group. A bad break had been made. That is no longer true. It is easy to talk about Jesus anywhere today (indeed, it is beginning to be quite the thing to do). Everyone professes at least some familiarity with his life and teaching.

Further, our bookshelves are crowded with new lives of Jesus and books about him. Everyone, from Papini to Bruce Barton, from Ludwig to Middleton Murry, is taking a hand at giving his own interpretation of that personality. (Let me say in passing that to anyone who knows the Gospel records, most of these interpretations seem rather warped and forced, far from accurate portraits. Mixed in with a few scraps of true insight is much chaff, simply untrue to the facts.) We are fast approaching the point where anyone may feel a somewhat condescending sense of proprietorship over Jesus.

Moreover, there has never been a time when the rank and file of men were so ready to acknowledge the moral mastery of Jesus as today, especially his mastery in our great corporate problems and relationships. It was not many years ago that men scoffed at the principles of Jesus as impractical, mad ideals. But the War and what has followed it have been the great disillusioners. Those same men—statesmen and politicians as well as historians and idealists—are now telling us that these same mad ideals alone are practical, that if a way is to be found through the complex relationships of mankind and our harassed world is to be brought out of the confusion in which it finds itself, it must be in accordance with what we call the ethical principles of Jesus. Today, if ever, Jesus stands preeminent as the master of the centuries, the moral leader of mankind.

But, *second*, men are more uncertain possibly than they have ever been before what to think of Jesus—how they shall interpret him, what place they shall accord him other than that of the greatest human life of all time. To be sure, they speak confidently of his divinity, his deity. But they cannot for the life of them explain clearly what they mean. It is a time of clear acknowledgment of Christ's moral supremacy. It is a time of confused uncertainty regarding Christ's theological significance.

In our study, we shall say nothing of theories about Jesus or doctrines concerning him, not that we do not believe them true and, in their place, important, but that we do not believe that that is the best way for us to approach Jesus if he is to hold fullest meaning in our lives. There are two distinct aspects to the place which Christ may hold in our life. The first is our experience of Christ's meaning for us, what influence actually and vitally

he exerts over us, what would be missing from life if he were removed. The second is our interpretation of that experience, our intellectual theories about him deduced from that experience. The Church has always tended to confuse the true sequence; out of that mistake have come many of our theological controversies through the centuries. It has tried to make people believe certain doctrines *about* Jesus in the hope that this would produce in them certain experiences *of* Jesus. The reverse is the true order. We need to remind ourselves of the great truth which Dr. A. B. Davidson was so fond of pointing out, that behind theology there lies religion and behind religion there lies a personal experience. This is the order which Jesus would have us take, for it was ever his method to point men to his life and his work and from these, from the meaning which he was coming to have in their lives, to allow them to formulate their own theories about him. So it was when John the Baptist sent some of his followers to ask whether Jesus really was the long-expected savior of the Jewish people. "Tell John what you have seen and heard; the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the good news is being preached."¹ Nothing more. This was the order with the first disciples and the Early Church. Be clear in your own mind where these troublesome doctrines about Jesus came from. The early Christians knew Jesus, he came to mean certain things to them in their lives, and from these experiences they were driven to certain deductions regarding him which we call doctrines. The doctrine of the divinity of Christ did not arise out of speculation but out of life. It is not primarily a philosophical formulation but an attempt to give adequate intellectual expres-

¹ Luke 7:22.

sion to some tremendous experience. That is the way we got all of the doctrines which confuse and trouble us so today; originally they were just interpretations of what had happened in the inner lives of human beings. And if theories about Jesus are ever to have significant meaning for us today, it will be because we have come to them in the same way, because our experience of what Jesus has come to mean to us has driven us to them. If the Jesus of the Gospels, freed within the limits of possibility of all preconceived notions of his person, does not make on the open mind of the earnest searcher for God an impression of divinity, then no theory or argument we can set up can convince him. If the Jesus of the Gospels does make that impression, criticism can do little to destroy it permanently.

What, then, is the meaning which Jesus may hold for you and me today? Here I must be forgiven for being very personal; if it is true that it is each man's experience of Jesus which is alone significant, then it is that experience as it has come to me very fragmentarily and incompletely which you will wish me to give. To me, Jesus is the answer to just those two fundamental questions which inevitably and continually trouble our lives and the answer to which we said mankind was ever seeking from religion.

Jesus is, first of all, the guide of our thinking, the interpreter of life, the master mind of the centuries. This is the aspect of his supremacy which has always received least emphasis. It is the aspect of his supremacy which men will be least willing to concede today. "Yes, we acknowledge his preeminence in his own field—the moral and spiritual field—as prophet and mystic and idealist. But intellectual mastery—never! How could it be that

one with the intellectual horizons of 2000 years ago, without the scientific knowledge and the historical perspective which are second nature to us—how could it be that one so limited could have anything of value to say to the *mind* of today?" Yet I confess that it is precisely here that I find Jesus' supremacy most certain, most inescapable. Yes, and if he cannot hold the mastery of our lives here, then he cannot hold it anywhere, for he who rules the world's life must be able to guide the world's thought.

I read in the Gospels one of his impossible paradoxes—"Unless you become as little children you cannot enter the Kingdom of God"² or "he who seeks to save his life loses it, while he who loses his life finds it"³—preposterous sayings, they seem, which have against them common sense as well as the wisdom of the philosophers, sayings which run directly counter to the accepted practices of the world, sayings to which the world renders lip service and life scoffing. I say to myself, "This is nonsense." Then I go out into the world, encounter the facts of life—and I discover that he is right; they are true.

Or it may be that the process is just the reverse. I go out into the experience of life, seeking an explanation of some problem, searching for truth. I fumble along befuddled and perplexed. Possibly I make some rather bad mistakes. Then I begin to catch a glimmer of light. I seem on the point of a discovery of great truth, but I cannot quite lay my hands on it. Then, lo and behold, I discover that twenty centuries ago Jesus saw this thing for which I grope and expressed it perfectly in some simple statement like, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God,"⁴ thus revealing the relation between purity of life and vision of the truth—or, "He who wills to

² Mark 10:15.

³ Mark 8:35.

⁴ Matthew 5:8.

do God's will shall know,"⁵ thus revealing the relation between moral earnestness and vision of the truth. My thought is like a boomerang. Start it where you will, send it out into the free spaces of speculation in search of truth, and eventually it returns to alight at the same spot—at the mind of Christ. Or, to suggest a very crude metaphor, it is as if one were in a desperate race to truth. He knows of an unmarked short cut which he feels certain will enable him to win. So he tears through underbrush and over ravines and up steep ascents until finally, heated and torn and weary, but glorying in anticipation of triumph, he rounds the last bend in his path and comes in sight of the end, to find—his opponent seated at the goal, bathed and rested and cool. Christ has beaten him to the goal of truth every time.

I discover nothing in the thought of Jesus which does not verify itself as true in experience. I discover in experience no truth of importance but to find it is already in Jesus' thought. And when this has happened not twice or thrice but dozens of times, I come to seek in him the answers to all of life's problems. The deeper one delves into life, the more the preeminence of every other great thinker is dimmed, the more partial his grasp of truth appears. It is just otherwise with Jesus. My experience is that the deeper into life one goes, the more perplexing it becomes, but—the more complete does Jesus' understanding of it seem. Therefore, not because anyone has told me it is so, nor because of any doctrines about him, but because it has proved true in experience, Jesus becomes the interpreter of life for me.

2) But these intellectual perplexities have never seriously

⁵ John 7:17.

troubled the majority of men; certainly to the first disciples and the early Christians they were not troublesome. For them the supremacy of Jesus has lain elsewhere. They have found in him *the giver of power for life*. He has proved their answer to life's second great need.

The older conceptions of how this came about are full of difficulties for us today. We would genuinely like to understand the experiences which seem to have been so real to the older generation; but, like the Greek of their textbooks, they are unintelligible to us. However, we need to remind ourselves once more that men's interpretations of their experiences change; spiritual experience itself is unchanging. Be sure that if association with Christ has ever been able really to bring added power into men's lives, it is able to do so today. And to those who succeed in jumping the mental hurdles which stop so many of us, Christ is still proving the giver of power for life.

I do not know whether we can explain exactly how this happens, but we can find a partial explanation at least from analogies in human experience. For one thing, sheer contact with the truth, contact such as we have said the mind of Christ gives, is bound to bring stability, confidence, and accessions of power. To know the truth is to have taken the first step toward being free. Then one knows from his human experience that he cannot place his life day by day alongside the life of any great man without an unconscious flow of some of the other's superabundant power into his own life. It was said of John Hay that whatever of greatness his later life revealed was planted in it unconsciously in those early years when, as private secretary to Abraham Lincoln, he was daily in association with a great life. You remember the saying that Printers' Row in Boston was brighter after Phillips

Brooks had passed by. It stands to reason that one cannot day by day seek to align his mind with the mind of Jesus and to bring his spirit into harmony with the spirit of Jesus without an unconscious flow of influence. That is at least part of the secret of his power with men—the contagion of a great personality. Once again anyone who will serve as my critic, bringing me daily face to face with my true self, is a source of strength to me, my benefactor. That, too, Jesus does supremely.

But, as I study the power of human friends over our lives, I realize that their greatest influence comes in none of these ways, but in a quite different way. It is through their faith in us. Think of that person who has had the greatest influence for good in your life, possibly your mother. She has taught you much of the truth you know about life. The companionship of her life, especially in childhood and boyhood years, has meant much strength to you. At times she has been your fearless critic; you are grateful for that. But closer study will show that most of the incalculable debt you owe to her is due to another influence she has had in your life—an intangible and illusive something which we call *faith*. We are what we are because of the transforming power of other people's faith in us.

This is the secret of Jesus' influence. The great word in his vocabulary, the word most frequently on his lips, was not love, but faith. It was faith he continually inspired in people—not only faith in God and faith in himself, but faith in themselves. That man helps me most who knows me through and through—all the bad in me and all the good in me—and believes in me still; who is the merciless critic of my life, but who can be so helpfully because in him criticism is overtopped by faith; who, while

criticizing, does something else far more difficult—as it were, places himself right within my life, showing me the lower and the higher self, the man I am and the man I might be, convinces me the better self can triumph, and allies himself with the higher nature he sees, to make it dominant in my life.⁹ That is the transforming power of persistent faith. And that is the power-giving influence upon us of steady contact with the mind and spirit of Jesus. There becomes real to us God's expectation of us, made known to us through Christ.

This suggests the final reason for the power men have found through Christ; he is their guide into companionship with God. Here again, may I be very personal? We come into a sense of companionship and copartnership with God in a variety of ways—through Nature, through meditation, through worship, through work, etc. For myself much of the experience of God has come through definite attempts at service, especially work with underprivileged folk in the slums of our great cities. But I discover on recollection that the God who has become a reality in these various ways is the Father of Jesus Christ.

Many people have taken their idea of God over from the Gospels all at once—wholesale, so to speak. I find that I have not; it has been built up laboriously, step by step. Let me try to express it in a figure. I discover my mind has been at work on something like the construction

⁹ "I perceive faults in my social acquaintances, but I do not make a practice of telling them their faults, because my relations with them are still subject to the abstract assumptions of our artificial selfhoods. But whatever fault I discover in one whom I love I make known to him: for thereby I address the self which I have discovered, simpler and greater than the self of that fault, and which can join me in being hostile to it." W. E. Hocking, "The Meaning of God in Human Experience," p. 432.

of a mosaic, seeking to fit a thousand different pieces, large and small, bit by bit, into a consistent whole—selecting, trying, rejecting, readjusting, testing. The pieces are picked up and used just as they come to hand. I do not note where each piece comes from; I use it. It is largely an intuitive and experimental process. The mosaic is very incomplete and will always remain so—in the process of being completed. But as far as it is now finished it shows itself to be made up of two distinct parts: There is a background, framing a central figure. The framework seems to furnish the atmosphere in which the central figure is set. It concerns the Universe and God's attributes in relation to the Universe—His majesty, His transcendence, His eternity, His omnipotence, etc. And I discover on examination that the pieces which make up the framework have come mainly from science and history and philosophy. But the central figure which gives to the whole mosaic its only real significance concerns the nature of God. It is the portrait of a toiling Fellow worker, an undiscourageable Friend, a loving Father. And when I examine the fragments of that central portion bit by bit, I discover that almost all the pieces, if not every piece, have come from the same source—the mind of Jesus. They have been placed in the mosaic because they proved themselves in experience to fit; but originally they came from him. That is the fact of the case which I cannot evade. That is what I mean by an empirical approach to my view of Christ. I do not say, "No man cometh unto the Father except by him." I do say, "I have come to the Father only by him."

A few years ago, a friend of mine, who all his life had been a great lover of art, took as his traveling compan-

ion through Italy a college lad whose attitude toward all things artistic was one of haughty disdain. My friend was too wise to press his interest in the beautiful upon him. For several days they toured Rome, doing what the boy suggested, seeing only the things in which the boy was interested. One day as they were passing St. Peter's, the older man said, "Do you mind if we slip in here for just a minute; there's one painting on the ceiling I want to take just a glance at." They stayed less than a minute. The next day it was five minutes in one of the art galleries, then half an hour at the Coliseum, and so on. When they returned home at the end of the summer, the young boy too was a lover of art. My friend had, without the lad's realization, introduced him to the meaning of beauty. Jesus does something similar to that in our understanding of God. Day by day we seek to attune our minds to his as we find it in the Gospel records. We try to make vivid his personality, steeling our imaginations to send us through the course of his life with him as an understanding companion. We set ourselves to learn what he thought and how he felt, and why. Gradually, or it may be suddenly, we awake to the recognition that, in the process of understanding Jesus, God, the God whom he called Father, has become real to us. So it is not simply that we *believe* in God "through" Jesus Christ but—far more significant—we *know* God through Jesus Christ.

There is an incident recorded in the Gospel of John to which I always return when considering the mastery of Jesus.⁷ It is a portrait in frank realism, for the central figure is Simon Peter and, whatever else he may have

⁷ John 6:66-69.

been, Peter was above everything else a realist. He faced the facts of life fearlessly, practically, relentlessly. There is no better example of his realism than this incident. It stands at the very central point in the drama of Jesus' life. Behind is a story of early great popularity, of vast crowds and many cures and boundless enthusiasm, and then popularity increasingly colored by opposition, argument, clash. Ahead is the certain prospect of further conflict. Just over the horizon are darker clouds which can mean only one end. To anyone with vision, the shadow of the Cross falls unmistakably across the path.

This occasion stands at the crisis. The feeble hearted have already melted away. Of the vast crowds, only a scattered handful remain; they are held largely by a sense of shame. None of this escapes Jesus. And so he tests them with the question, "Will you also go away?" We sense a dumb silence which Jesus fully understands. And then Peter—selfish, blundering, materially minded Peter—pierces to the heart of the situation: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life?"

It is a portrait in realism. And Peter was a realist for two reasons: First, because he insisted on facing practically life's alternatives; he was never satisfied with a merely negative answer but put to himself relentlessly the question, "If not this, then what?" Second, because he was a desperately earnest man and, as such, he knew he must have a leader for his life. Realism is one of the great words in the vocabulary of our day, but few of us have the courage to be true realists. The man who is in earnest about life and who therefore seeks leadership—guidance for his mind and power for his life—will, even in moments of most difficult doubt, find himself facing Peter's alternative, "If not Christ, what?" And he will

find himself returning from all the experiences which life may bring with steadier conviction day by day, "Lord, to whom can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

CHAPTER V

OBSTACLES TO BELIEF—EVIL

We have already said that most of the doubt about our religious faith which hovers across our minds is not at its roots genuine intellectual difficulty at all but is due to some other cause, although an element of true skepticism is usually present. Sometimes it is "an attitude of intellectual adventure with a mental equipment altogether inadequate for the task." Sometimes it is due to a misconception of what religious belief is supposed to be and do—the expectation of an absolute and final certainty which can leave no room for question. Sometimes it is the failure to think through difficulties as they appear. Sometimes it is skepticism without the moral earnestness which alone would make solution possible. Sometimes it is the fluctuation of passing moods. Sometimes it is "a place of refuge from an uncomfortable moral challenge." Most often of all, it is some maladjustment within the life of the doubter, some disharmony of that life with the lives of his fellows and of God, which makes the whole world appear disjointed and meaningless and faith impossible. If we could straighten out the inner lives of people, we could solve well over ninety per cent of the world's intellectual difficulties.

That does not mean that there are no intellectual puzzles in religion. It means that most of us, blatant doubters though we be, have never gone far enough in our thinking

or our living to enter those chambers where real difficulty begins. But to some of us doubt is a real problem; with many of us it hovers like a specter; all of us, if we take religion in earnest, it will confront at times of severe testing, and we need to be prepared. And so I want to face with you the genuine obstacles to faith and how we should meet them.

At the very outset let us remind ourselves that the greatest obstacles lie not where we sometimes pretend they do—not in the immensity of the University nor in the apparent mechanism of its operation, not in the teaching of modern psychology nor in the skeptical implications of philosophy, not even in the tragedy of a World War. Our real difficulties lie in the hard facts of experience which life brings to us.

1. Here is a young life which seems to hold peculiar promise, a Junior in college, let us say—unusual intellectual ability, popular with everyone, a constructive influence in college life, a successful career assured, the pride of his whole family who have wrapped up in him their interest and their hope. He is snapped off suddenly—a typhoid germ or an auto accident—the life is gone, the family is destitute of hope and interest, the world has lost a leader it sorely needed. How can one justify it? What can be the purpose of that? Almost the only case of pure intellectual difficulty among college men and women which I have ever met had a cause much like that. A brother in whom the family's hopes had been centered was struck down by pneumonia, without warning or apparent reason. And the tender soul which was left, ill prepared in her youthfulness for the shock of loss, poured out the bitterness of her heart in these lines:—

"The Gods, they live on Mt. Olympia
In regal state.
While men below in common life,
Are slaves to fate.
The Gods surrounded by the comfort
That luxury affords—
And men toil on in misery
Forgotten by their Lords."

This is not classic poetry, but it is the spontaneous cry of a deeply troubled spirit.

It is not alone the personal loss in the taking of such a life, but the world's loss. It was partly this problem which drove Tennyson to the doubt which fought its way through to the triumphant faith of *In Memoriam*—that a life with the promise of his young friend Arthur Hallam should have been taken away.

"So many worlds, so much to do.
So little done; such things to be."

2. Or here is a life once strong and useful and self-reliant, but now become old and feeble and decrepit, the fullness of the faculties gone, memory of the past and interest in the future alike dead, possibly destined to drag on year after year in an institution for the aged—a life eager to go, yet held on interminably, it seems. What meaning can there be in that?

3. Or it may be that needless and purposeless suffering confronts us—a life which never knows an instant free from harrowing pain, or a child doomed permanently to invalidism through a parent's sin or a physician's carelessness. Or, possibly worse, a delicate and tender nature forced to live with a coarse spirit which wounds it at every word.

4. Or it may be simply the apparent futility of life itself

which is most likely to strike us. Effort brings no success, virtue brings no reward, sacrifice brings no recognition. Life is perverse, unreasonable, cruel. What is the use? Is there any meaning in it? Is it worth while?

This is what we call the problem of suffering or the problem of evil; out of it spring those heartrending questionings which tear men's souls and at times make faith seem impossible. What answer does religion make to these difficulties?

Let us understand at once that religion makes no attempt to give a final answer; it is of the very nature of her reply that, after all that can be said in explanation has been said, there still remains a vastness of unanswered questions. Indeed, we do not demand a complete explanation of evil. We require two things:—so much understanding of the reason for evil as shall enable us to give ourselves without reserve to conquering it; and the assurance that it is possible to achieve a practical transcendence of evil.

Moreover, there is one point concerning doubt on which we should be clear before going further. Difficulty of faith is not the characteristic of the superficial but of the profound mind; not of those who have skimmed the surface of religion but of those who have sought to plumb its greatest depths. Of the prophet Habbakuk, George Adam Smith says, "He illustrates the great commonplace of religious doubt, that problems arise and become rigorous in proportion to the purity and tenderness of a man's conception of God. It is not the coarsest but the finest temperaments which are exposed to skepticism. Every advance in the assurance of God or in appreciation of His character develops new perplexities in the face of the facts of

experience, and faith becomes her own most cruel troubler." ¹

Religion does point out the following facts to help us toward an answer to the perplexity of suffering:

1. *There must be the possibility of evil in a world in which there is to be the possibility of good.* Many people never feel the power of this fact. But it is true of all of life. There can be no light unless there be the possibility of darkness. There could be no beauty were there not ugliness to make beauty real. And in a world of moral freedom, a world which has any moral meaning at all, there can be no such thing as virtue in the life of any human being unless in that life there lies ever present the possibility of vice. There can be no such thing as character save it be the conquest of, and freedom from, sin. A world without evil would be heaven. But a world without the possibility of evil would be worse than hell; for such a world would take from life all meaning whatsoever and leave us colorless, purposeless, amoral automatons. That means that evil is a necessity, you say? No; but it means that the *possibility* of evil is a necessity. And in a world where men are struggling for the achievement of character, it does practically result in evil.

This fact aids considerably in answering our problem. It is not enough merely to complain of suffering. To overthrow faith because of evil, you must actually be able to conceive of a world which, taking it as a whole and recognizing fully the incalculable price we pay for man's freedom, would be better than our world. Carping criticism is easy; constructive criticism is another matter. When suffering strikes us with its cruelty and irrationality, we are quick enough to cry that God should have made

¹ George Adam Smith, "The Twelve Prophets," Vol. II, p. 136.

a better world; but when it is asked *how* He could have made the world better and still preserved to us the freedom which makes us men, we are silent. The more one ponders this old world of ours, the less is he inclined to suggest improvements.

2. Then we must recognize that *most*, but not all, of *the suffering of life is due to man's failure somewhere*—not necessarily immediately, but ultimately, if we trace back the evil to its true source. It is partly the price we pay for the adventure of evolution—the fact that our humanity has not yet attained maturity but is in the process of attainment. We are still children, only a few short stages removed from our brute ancestors, and some of our suffering is the racial experience of the child's blundering freedom. It is the growing pains of humanity; and such suffering carries no blame. But it is partly the deliberate or careless failure which is sin. It has been failure to respect the laws of health; or it has been a foolish choice in youth; or it has been the mistake of someone in our ancestry, possibly far, far back. Often it is difficult to locate the blame, but almost always it can be traced to man's sin or mistake somewhere. I suppose some would call this the social view of sin. It is only another and arresting proof that we are all brothers together, and that we must think of mankind as a unit, not only in this generation but in the interlocking of ourselves with all generations which have gone before and which will follow after. It is true that the sins of the fathers issue in the suffering of the third and fourth generations and in ways more intricate than we yet comprehend. This is as necessary as that there should be the possibility of evil if there is to be goodness. In a world which was made to be a fellowship of brothers, it is absolutely inevitable that the sin of one

should throw its curse on all the others. Mankind must be saved together or it cannot be saved at all; complete individual salvation is a myth.

3. There still remains the difficulty of what we call *natural evil*—earthquakes, famines, and catastrophes over which man could have no control. Until late years, this has always been an inexplicable puzzle. But here again science is pointing us toward light, for it is now telling us that *Nature itself*, like man, is in some sense in the throes of evolution and that what seem like miscarriages in Nature's orderly processes may be the price Nature itself is paying in the struggle toward a higher and fuller orderliness.

4. Religion points to one further fact concerning evil—not only that there must be the possibility of evil if there is to be the possibility of good, but also that *right out of the heart of evil itself great good may and often does come*. It is one of life's many paradoxes. It is as though out of some noxious spring the purest water flowed; as though from a venomous bite came the most robust health. A friend of mine was once crossing the Atlantic with a chemist whose field of experimentation was the manufacture of artificial perfumes. As they were standing by the rail one day, he asked my friend to close his eyes and held beneath his nose a small vial. "What do you smell?" he asked. "The most fragrant lilies of the valley I have ever known," replied my friend. "No," said the chemist, "what you are smelling is camphor balls." Out of a particularly obnoxious household article he had made a rare perfume. Something like that men have ever been doing with the experience of evil. As a matter of fact, history says that the noblest spirits have been souls turned forth from the white heat of the furnace of suffering. And the

great proof of it is the supreme paradox of history—that from the most dastardly feat of evil man has ever committed, the crucifixion of Jesus, there has flowed forth into the world's life the greatest power to redeem mankind and banish evil. It is as though evil, when it is too insufferable, becomes its own undoing. It was so in the Cross of Jesus. It may be that this is a final proof that, in spite of all superficial evidence to the contrary, our world is in the ultimate control of the goodness of God.

The great souls of the ages have seen this. It is said that these lines were found scribbled on the walls of a hospital room beside a bed where unusual suffering had taken place:

“The cry of man's anguish went up to God.

‘Lord, take away pain!

The shadow that darkens the world Thou hast made,

The close-coiling chain

That strangles the heart; the burden that weighs

On the wings that should soar—

Lord, take away pain from the world Thou hast made

That it love Thee the more!’

“Then answered the Lord to the cry of the world,

‘Shall I take away pain,

And with it the power of the soul to endure,

Made strong by the strain?

Shall I take away pity that knits heart to heart

And sacrifice high?

Will ye lose all your heroes that lift from the fire

White brows to the sky?

Shall I take away love that redeems with a price

And smiles at its loss?

Can ye spare from your lives that would cling unto mine

The Christ on his cross?”

This does not mean that good always comes of evil. It means that good always, yes, always, *may* come of evil.

Yet all we can say still leaves lingering question marks, vast areas of suffering which seem irrational, inexcusable. Just when we think our minds are satisfied, some peculiarly grievous case of the injustice of evil presses home upon us and we revolt against it all. I remember hearing Maud Royden say once, "I never try to explain evil. When people ask me for an explanation of suffering, I tell them that I have none. But I tell them that I have a power which can conquer suffering." Another, speaking as a philosopher, has said much the same thing: "Christianity has not explained suffering and evil; no one has done so; no one can do so. Yet Christianity has done two things greater, more profound, and profitable for us. Christianity has, from the first, immensely deepened and widened the fact, the reality, the awful potency, and baffling mystery of sorrow, pain, sin, things which abide with man across the ages. And Christianity has from the first immensely increased the capacity, the wondrous secret and force, which issues in a practical, living, loving transcendence, utilization, transformation of sorrow and pain, and even of sin. . . . Christianity gave to souls the faith and strength to grasp life's nettle."²

But Christianity has said two further words about evil, not so much by way of explanation, but by way of triumph over evil.

The first is that, by the very nature of the case, *belief must always be difficult and, at times, irrational*, because then belief requires courage and courage is the central core of life. For courage is part of what we mean by faith.

There is no word in all the vocabulary of religion more misused than faith. Faith is not intellectual belief. It is

² Baron Von Hügel, "Essays and Addresses," p. 110ff.

not credulity, the willingness to accept a highly improbable hypothesis. It is not some mystical or psychical quality. Faith is not primarily belief about anything; it is courage to do something. That is what the writers of the New Testament meant by faith—"not belief in something without regard to its truth but doing something without regard to its consequences." "By faith, Abraham, leaving his home, went out into an unknown land, not knowing whither he went."³ Faith is courage. There is the faith of the single act—the courage to do some one particularly difficult thing which is believed to be right. And there is the faith of the whole life—the courage to live all of life in a great belief, by the highest hypothesis your life can discover. That is the pathway many have discovered out of the perplexities of evil. Do you recall Joaquin Miller's great lines on "Columbus"?

"Behind him lay the gray Azores,
Behind the Gates of Hercules;
Before him not the ghost of shores,
Before him only shoreless seas.
The good mate said, 'Now must we pray,
For lo! the very stars are gone.
Brave Admiral, speak, what shall I say?'
'Why, say, "Sail on! sail on! and on!"'

"They sailed and sailed, as winds might blow,
Until at last the blanched mate said:
'Why now not even God would know
Should I and all my men fall dead.
These very winds forget their way,
For God from these dread seas is gone.
Now speak, brave Admiral, speak and say—'
He said: 'Sail on! sail on! and on!'

³ Hebrews 11:8.

"They sailed. They sailed. Then spoke the mate:
 'This mad sea shows his teeth tonight.
He curls his lip, he lies in wait,
 With lifted teeth, as if to bite!
Brave Admiral, say but one good word:
 What shall we do when hope is gone?'
The words leapt like a leaping sword:
 'Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!'

"Then, pale and worn, he kept his deck,
 And peered through darkness. Ah, that night
Of all dark nights! and then a speck—
 A light! a light! a light! a light!
It grew, a starlit flag unfurled!
 It grew to be Time's burst of dawn.
He gained a world; he gave that world
 Its grandest lesson: 'On! sail on!'

That is the first message of Christianity:—"Courage!
Faith! Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!"

But Christianity has a more profound word than that, for the spirit of Miller's poem is, in a sense, the spirit of stoicism. Christianity's first word, evil cannot subdue the soul of courage. Its second word, there is no such thing as harm from evil to the true soul, the soul which knows God. To it, evil is the very instrument by which that soul's own noblest life shall come. There is a single verse in St. Paul which is possibly the most profound he ever wrote: "All things work together for good to those who love God." ⁴ All things, *all things*! That is Christianity's final word on the problem of suffering. And that is Christianity's supreme faith. It is a faith which offers no rational explanation of all the perplexity, the injustice, the tragedy of life. It is a faith which points out that much of

⁴ Romans 8:28.

man's suffering is explicable, possibly inevitable. It is a faith which points to the values which have come into human life through suffering. But it is a faith which confesses its inability to tell the whole story. It is a faith which, granting the limitations of its knowledge, raises its head in triumphant confidence and proclaims with a certainty which brooks no denying that over the soul which loves God, the soul which is earnestly set to live its life in fullest service, evil has absolutely no power—that to that soul every experience which life may bring—perplexity, disappointment, separation, sorrow, pain, death itself—everything works together for *good*. That is the heart of the Christian faith. That is the final insight into the meaning of life.

THE LIVING OF LIFE

CHAPTER VI

THE STARTING POINT—MORAL EARNESTNESS

Heretofore we have been thinking almost entirely about matters of belief. What shall we think about this life of ours, about this Universe in which we find ourselves? What may we honestly and intelligently believe about God? What attitude should we take toward Jesus; what is the meaning of Christ for the modern man? How shall we face the experiences of life which make belief difficult? But, as we said at the outset, man's interest in religion has ever been a twofold one. He has asked not only light on life's meaning, but also power for life's living. The second demand has ever been the more earnest, the more insistent, the more significant. It is with this problem of the living of life, the mastery of life, that we shall be concerned from now on.

A few years since, four recent graduates of one of our great eastern universities were seated in their university club in New York City on a certain Sunday afternoon. Three of them happened to be vitally interested in religion. They were discussing with genuine earnestness the spiritual life of their college, the work of the Christian Association, the moral concerns of the campus. The fourth was a typical college graduate. He sat, slunk down in a heavily upholstered chair, his eyes half closed, his feet on the warm radiator, a cigarette hanging from one corner of

his mouth, the Sunday newspaper spread across his lap with the comic section on top. Obviously he was bored by their conversation. Finally, as their talk grew more intense and shifted from the moral concerns of that college to the moral problems of the world in the day in which we live, he pulled his feet down from the radiator, dropped his cigarette into a waiting ashtray, stretched, and, as he sauntered off for a game of Sunday afternoon bridge with some friends, dropped this remark as his summary of their conversation, "Well, what difference does it make anyway?"

That incident is important for two insights which it gives us. First of all, as a criticism of the kind of religion many Christians have—a religion so colorless, so innocuous, that to the casual observer it seems to make no difference at all. You may be sure of one thing: that is not genuine Christianity, for, whatever else we may say for it, wherever Christianity has been real from the days of the Early Church down to the present, it has always made a difference, a difference so great that he who runs may note.

But the incident is important, in the second place, as an insight into the moral attitude of the speaker—an attitude which can best be described as moral neutrality. There was nothing in particular the matter with that man. He was a good fellow. (As someone has said, "He was good; but good for nothing.") His name will never bring disgrace to himself, his family, or his university. He might be considered a very reputable and representative alumnus. But when it comes to a downright moral issue of any kind, his attitude is one of strict neutrality: "Well, what difference does it make anyway?"

We said his attitude was that of a typical college gradu-

ate. Would it be unfair to say that it is also that of a typical undergraduate—that our college students are most distinguished morally by a certain colorless and innocuous neutrality? Toward those who carry responsibility for moral issues and moral causes, who plan and toil in the burden of organizations and movements which stand for finer, idealistic things, who are struggling to remake the life of the world and the life of the campus, who are giving of themselves day in and day out that individual men and women may find themselves in life—for all these we have a benevolent sympathy, albeit a somewhat condescending sympathy. We feel they must be doing good work; we know they mean well. And to the causes they represent, our attitude is the same. If money is asked for, we may give, perhaps generously, though seldom as much as we will spend on a single prom or a single big game week-end. If time is asked for, we may give that too, in moderation, though seldom as much as we spend on teas or bridge or bull sessions. But if active support is asked for, if it is suggested that any obligation in these matters rests on us (obligations, for instance, which might involve a difference in the choice of our life work), especially if criticism arises or there is an issue which forces the lining up on one side or the other—then, consciously or unconsciously, our answer is, “Well, what difference does it make anyway?” Benevolent sympathy, yes. But active partisanship, never! In the pinches we are morally neutral.

Now there are only two things to be said about moral neutrality. The first is: *It is absolutely impossible*. Doctor Fosdick tells the story of a man who was rowing down the Niagara River past Buffalo. He could not make up his mind whether or not to get off at Buffalo. First he

thought he would; then he thought he wouldn't. He was undecided. Ultimately he awoke at the foot of Niagara Falls to discover that he had decided not to get off at Buffalo. He had decided by indecision.

And so it is with life. Life, on our college campus or in the world, is no static affair, no placid lake of moral negativeness upon which we can float in complacent indifference—benevolent in spirit toward all men and all causes, courageous in action for no man and no cause. Life is dynamic. Whether we recognize it or not, you and I live in a world which is teeming with moral problems, a world through which there flows ceaselessly a stream of moral struggle, a world in which great issues are being fought out every hour of the day, in which great wrongs cry for righting, great problems struggle for solution, men and women and little children yearn inarticulately for freedom and life which should be theirs. "Truth forever on the scaffold; Wrong forever on the throne." To be sure, we may be deliberately or carelessly blind to these facts if we choose. But that *is* the world in which we live. In such a world there can be no such thing as moral neutrality.

As our friend in the university club spoke, three pictures came vividly to the mind of one of his companions. The first is a scene not four hundred yards from where they stood. It is a small, dingy tenement room, typical of hundreds of thousands which line the East Side of New York City—less than half a mile from the luxurious Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue palaces which are called apartment houses. There are two other rooms, somewhat smaller and darker. The family numbers seven. In one corner, seated on a rickety cot, is a girl of nineteen, dressed entirely in black, her face and lips tastily painted, on her face the defiant surliness of the girl of the street. She

earns \$16 a week, selling \$100 hats in a Fifth Avenue millinery shop; but she spends more than that on herself and her clothes and her pleasures. Beside her is a younger sister, who is also on the streets, but not through deliberate waywardness; for on her face are the unmistakable marks of mental deficiency, the sickly smile so familiar in inmates of girls' reformatories. Then there is a younger boy with the same sickly, half-witted expression. On the floor are two clear-eyed, bright-faced youngsters, absolutely untouched thus far by the temptations which have sent their two sisters on the streets. Finally, the mother, a Bohemian, a strong, vigorous, self-reliant woman of forty-five. She has brought seven children into the world. She wanted to bring them up as should have been done, but how could she? For twenty-five years, from eight in the morning until five at night she has rolled cigars in a near-by factory, earning enough for the family to live on. Every spare hour of early morning and late evening is filled with the incessant round of cooking, washing, ironing, cleaning, sewing. Now she faces two daughters who have gone astray, absolutely beyond the reach of a love which would have sacrificed itself to save them, for behind the rugged exterior there is a rare maternal tenderness—far more, I fear, than our friend knows in his Park Avenue home. And, on the floor, two others—just as the two eldest were ten years ago. What about their future? There is only one plea the woman has to make—cannot something be done to save these from the ruin in which the others are already enmeshed?

That is not an extreme picture. It could be duplicated by the hundreds in New York City alone, and in every great city of the land. And it is important primarily not as a picture. It is important as a symbol, a symbol of a

society riddled with problems demanding solution, of a social system permeated with injustice—above all, a symbol of downright human need. “Well, what difference does it make anyway?” In a world where such need and such problems exist, there is no such thing as moral neutrality.

The second picture is a scene familiar to many of us. It is a corner of a field somewhere in France. On all sides are whittled tree stumps. The ground as far as the eye can see is seared and torn. There is *débris* everywhere—strings of barbed wire, twisted bits of track, gun carriages, empty shells, bent bayonets, everything. Here and there is a fragment of a wall—once a farmhouse or a factory or a village church. And then, scattered all through the underbrush and tree stumps and *débris*, little, crude wooden crosses—some white and some black, the white and the black all mixed in together. (There is a tragic pathos in that indiscriminate intermingling of the black and white crosses on the battlefields of France where the dead of the opposing armies lie side by side, as though mocking in their silent partnership in death those who tried to convince them they were enemies in life. It is a testimony to the fundamental unreality—aye, futility, of it all.)

There is nothing extreme in that picture. It could be duplicated all over France and East Prussia and Russia and the Balkans and the Caucasus, to the number of 10,000,000 crosses. And it is important primarily not as a picture. It is important as a symbol—as a symbol, of course, of millions of lives sacrificed for a great cause which has never seen complete fruition, a symbol of high ideals professed but never fully realized. It is a symbol, above all, of a world torn with jealousy and suspicion and

hatred and fear, of problems to be solved and ideals to be championed, of a humanity to be reconciled. "Well, what difference does it make anyway?" In a world where universal brotherhood continuously struggles to be born, there is no such thing as moral neutrality.

The third picture carries us back, far back—back in time 1900 years. And far away, past the battle crosses of France to Palestine, to a homely hill just outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem where three crosses are set up and three men are being killed by crucifixion—two robbers, and, in the center, one different from the others. And, as a curious crowd passes by on its way into the city, one seems to hear many remark in the language of their day, "Well, what difference does it make anyway?" Make no mistake; Jesus Christ was crucified by moral neutrality.

That picture, too, is not important as a single picture. It is important for all it represents—those who have followed after and who have suffered the same annihilation of hopes he knew; the cause he came to proclaim and to advance and for which he died, a cause still alive in the world, still struggling for realization, still seeking defenders, still impeded by a dead weight of benevolent neutrality. *In a world through the heart of which there runs a moral purpose, requiring your cooperation and mine for its fulfillment, there can be no such thing as moral neutrality.* Jesus saw that when he said, "He who is not with me is against me." He whose life is not given deliberately in the defense of right is an abettor of wrong; he whose life is not devoted wholly to the cause of Christ in the world must be numbered among the enemies of Christ.

We said there were two facts about moral neutrality. First, it is absolutely impossible. Second, *it is absolutely*

unsatisfactory. We have spoken before of the restlessness which is abroad in the life of youth today. It is the most outstanding characteristic of our undergraduate life—this strange, incoherent, undirected, unself-conscious restlessness—a restless dissatisfaction. Youth is dissatisfied with everything—with the curriculum, with the leadership of the older generation, with ourselves, above all with life and its opportunities. To satisfy that dissatisfaction, we seek various experiences. We want reality; by which we mean a kind of crude, primitive realism of undisciplined emotion and uncontrolled ambition. We want release, freedom; by which we mean freedom from restraint and artificial and unreal convention. What we really want, if only we had understanding enough to recognize it, is some center for life which could bring order and unity out of the chaos of our living, some leader for life in whose wisdom we could trust, some cause in life into which we could throw ourselves completely and, by losing ourselves, find the life we seek. In brief, what we really want is, once again, religion; for ours is an unsatisfactory life which tries to be morally neutral in a morally purposeful Universe.

And what of our friend in his university club? As he stood there that Sunday afternoon with sallow complexion and drooping mouth, flabby of muscle, dull of eye, devoid of vigor—and, next to him, one of the most brilliant and popular recent graduates of that same university, a man who has since left this country to give his life in Christian service in a foreign land—erect, vigorous, dynamic, joyous—the contrast between the two men was all the proof needed of how unsatisfactory is the philosophy our friend represented. The man who is morally indifferent may fool himself into thinking that he is happy. He never fools one

who knows the inner lives of college undergraduates. There is within us an inextinguishable desire for something better than that. We were made to be partisans—partisans of the weak against the strong, of the higher against the lower, of the right against the wrong, partisans in an eternal moral struggle, partisans of God in the task of establishing His kingdom. Our lives are restless until they find rest in that partisanship.

If ours is a Universe of moral purpose, this must be the starting point in the living of life—the recognition that through all of life (my life and the life of the world) there runs a ceaseless moral struggle. There is no evading it. In the meeting of it with moral earnestness, we begin truly to live. Carlyle was right: There is a basic choice which confronts each one of us, “Wilt thou be a hero or a coward?” That choice each one of us makes for himself.

Life is much like a pathway climbing a steep mountain ascent. If you prefer to live down in the dank marshes or even on the dead level plain, where the overwhelming majority of men and women are perfectly satisfied to go along their unimaginative way, finding your purpose in life in the making of money or the attainment of social position or the running of organizations, finding your pleasures in the commonplace round of games and parties and dances and dates, feeling no challenge beyond the living of life from day to day, you can do so; and, of course, religion will hold no interest for you. But if you are not satisfied with that, if you want to live life up on the high altitudes where the vision is great and the atmosphere rare and clear and bracing, and the path is steep and the struggle hard and the way dangerous, if you are dissatisfied with a commonplace existence for your own life and are determined that it shall be something higher, if you are dissatisfied

with the lot of your fellow men and are resolved to spend and be spent that their lot shall be different, if you are dissatisfied with the world as it is and are prepared to throw *all* of your life for *all* time into the task of remaking it into the beauty of God's Kingdom—then you have made life's great fundamental choice; then you have taken the first step toward a full living of life.

“To every man there openeth
A Way, and Ways, and a Way,
And the High Soul climbs the High Way,
And the Low Soul gropes the Low,
And in between on the misty flats,
The rest drift to and fro.
But to every man there openeth
A High Way and a Low.
And every man decideth
The Way his soul shall go.”¹

¹ John Oxenham, “Bees in Amber.”

CHAPTER VII

POWER FOR LIFE—FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

A group of undergraduates in a middle-western teachers' college was discussing the hackneyed topic, "What is the matter with religion?" They had picked to pieces with the wisdom of the centuries the Church, the ministry, the creeds, and all the rest. The discussion seemed to make slight progress. Finally, a lad in the front row said with a finality which was obviously intended to settle the matter, "Why, I don't think there is anything the matter with religion. I believe in God. Practically everyone in this room believes in God!" Then the leader of the discussion put two questions. "How many of us in this group believe in God?" Almost every hand went up. "To how many of us in this room is God a living reality?" Scarcely one hesitant hand was raised.

In the contrast of those two questions we draw very close to the nub of the meaning of religion. They mark the difference between intellectual belief and personal experience, a difference as wide as the poles. It is the distinction between believing in a person and knowing that person. For some years I had believed in one of the great religious leaders of our country. I had heard him speak from conference platforms many and many a time. I had read his books and pamphlets. But a few years ago I had the privilege of travelling abroad with him. We worked together, we studied together, we talked together, we slept

together, we played together, we went sightseeing together. Now I *know* that man. I believe in Ghandi. I have read a good deal about him. I have studied his life and his teaching. I have sought to understand the inner impulses and motives which are the key to his conduct. But what a contrast between my relation to Ghandi and my relation to my mother. Him I believe in; but her I know. We meet the same distinction in the corporate experience of religion—the difference between an academic discussion concerning the nature of God and a living service of corporate worship.

We have spoken repeatedly of the two questions which underlie our interest in religion. The same two questions rise persistently with regard to God. First, "Can I believe in God?" It was this question for which we sought an answer in a previous chapter. It is important that we should do so, for we often fool ourselves into thinking that our lack of genuine Christian faith and life is due to sincere intellectual uncertainty. Even over the best of us doubt hovers like a specter in the closet. It is well for us to out with it and quash it once for all. I have spoken at such length along these lines because I believe with all my *mind* that Christianity can stand on its own feet intellectually; indeed, that the Christian explanation of the Universe and of life is the only one which ultimately will hold water intellectually. To that question we can reply, with our minds open to every breath of truth which human knowledge and human experience can bring, a confident "Yes."

But even when you have a foolproof intellectual substantiation of Christianity, you have a cold skeleton, a hollow framework, in your hands. Phillip Cabot is right when he says somewhere, "Faith begins with the heart, not with the head." Because religion is a living thing and

concerned with living life, what men want is not a conviction about God; what they really want is an experience of God. And I mean no particular form of mysterious or emotional or supernatural experience, but just the quiet inner certainty which comes from the laying hold by one's whole being—mind, heart, and will—of an undeniable objective reality, that certainty which religious men have always had. Our second question, then, is, "Can I experience God? Can I *know* God in anything like the same sense in which I know my mother or my closest friend? Is there anything real and permanent, anything real for me, in what men call religious experience?" To this question we can reply with the same confident "Yes"; for it is precisely this experience of God—an experience of friendship with a Father—which religion has always professed to give.

It is when our lives are at their deepest and finest that this desire for the assured companionship of God comes most strongly upon us. You hear it said frequently that men never turn to religion until trouble comes and then it is that we fall back on religion as a refuge and a comfort. When you hear such statements made, give them an emphatic lie. That is a cheap use of religion and a cheap brand of religion which is sought—refuge and comfort alone. If there are people who feel the desire for companionship with God only at such times, it means that at those times only do they live deeply and fully enough to come into touch with reality. What a tragedy—that it takes death or a catastrophe or the coming of a new life into the home to bring most people down to earth and into touch with reality, to bring them to their real selves! "The world seeks the church, uncritically, habitually, at those times when life most matters. Parents who have drifted

away from the church still bring their children back for baptism. Young people who profess to have outgrown religion still enter the church to be made man and wife. The last low whispers of the world's dead are not uniformly burdened with God's name but the church is always requisitioned to speak that name over those dead. In obedience to some deep, unreasoned prompting men seek churches when life is most real."¹

But let us suppose all this is a blank page to you. God as one whom you can know in experience means nothing. How can there become real to you what now seems desperately unreal, possibly pure nonsense?

1. First of all, by *understanding what religious experience is*—that it is no strange, mysterious, supernatural experience, absolutely different from everything else we know in life. There are those to whom God comes most frequently that way—mystics and saints and prophets. But we are not talking of them, but of ordinary garden variety of folk like ourselves. People sometimes complain that they do not *feel* God working in them. Certainly not. Why should they? Much the same principles apply in the spiritual as in the physical realm. We do not *feel* food being changed into blood and bone and brain. We do not *feel* a wound or bruise healing as Nature does her unobtrusive yet unceasing work. So, too, is it in the first instance with the operation of God in our lives. We must expect to find Him working in the same quiet way as in Nature. That is the first point to realize. And the second leads directly from it.

2. *We do not recognize God, because our eyes are blind to the evidences of Him on every hand.* Religious experi-

¹ Willard L. Sperry, "Reality in Worship," p. 30.

ence is not the discovery of new facts about God; it is a new vision of facts well known and long familiar. It is not a matter of proof but of insight; not a matter of argumentation but of appreciation. To say that is merely to state a fundamental fact which runs through all of life.

It is true of our appreciation of beauty. A few summers ago, a party of Americans were touring Europe under the guidance of the American Express Company on one of the inexpensive trips which make it possible to see "all of Europe" for three or four hundred dollars. They were in Switzerland, and had come to Interlaken. Interlaken, you will recall, is the village from which one gets his first view of the Jungfrau. As you stand behind the long line of hotels which flank the village street and look up the valley, the peak of the mountain, completely capped with snow, stands out against the sky, framed in a V-shaped gap in the green hillsides. It is one of the most magnificent scenic sights in all the world. This party reached Interlaken in the late evening, too late to see the view. The following morning after breakfast they came out from their hotels and stood gazing up the valley. It was a matchless summer day. Not a cloud dulled the sky. The Jungfrau, glistening in pure white, was framed by the bright green hillsides against the pure blue of the heavens. As they stood there, one of the party, a school teacher from Pottsville, Pennsylvania, turned to her companion and said, "So this is Switzerland! Well, I don't see why they bring us to Switzerland. Why, there's nothing to see in Switzerland but scenery; and we have scenery in Pottsville, Pennsylvania." Do you see that the difference between that woman and her neighbor, who stood silent before the sheer grandeur of the Alpine scene, was not a difference in the scenery on which they looked? The

same view raised itself before them both. And it was not a difference in their optical powers; for all we know, she may have had a very much better pair of eyes than he. The difference lay in the eyes of their imaginations, in the eyes of vision with which they looked. He saw one of Nature's most beautiful views; she saw the coal fields of Pottsville, Pennsylvania.

It is true of our appreciation of human personality. The story is told of two young doctors who were traveling together in China. They had been classmates in medical school. One was on a trip around the world, preparatory to setting up a lucrative practice in New York City. The other was on his way into the interior of China as a medical missionary. They were sailing up the Yangtze on a river boat and were approaching one of the small villages which line its banks. The end of the landing stage was black with Chinese coolies, gesticulating, jabbering, elbowing each other, pushing to catch coins thrown from the deck by the passengers, straining to be the first to carry the baggage ashore. As the two men stood by the ship's rail and looked down on the confused crowd, the doctor who was on his way around the world turned to his companion and said, "Damned dirty Chinks!" And the other who was on his way to medical service in the heart of China said, without a trace of sentimentality in his voice, "Brothers and sisters of yours, children for whom Christ died." Do you see the difference between those two men was not a difference in the people they were evaluating? They were looking at identically the same coolies. And it was not a difference in their eyesight. It was a difference in the eyes of their imaginations, their eyes of vision. One saw "damned dirty Chinks." The other saw children of God, brothers and sisters of his.

It is true of our appreciation of God. It has been the experience of religious men and women down through the centuries—to search for God clear round the world—through intellectual inquiry, through mystic and psychic and ritualistic experiences, through self-abasement and self-discipline—and then to find Him right beneath their feet, at their very finger tips, through a new appreciation of age-old facts and experiences.

“I said, ‘I will find God,’ and forth I went
 To seek him in the clearness of the sky,
 But over me stood unendurably
 Only a pitiless sapphire firmament
 Ringing the world,—blank splendor; yet intent
 Still to find God, ‘I will go seek,’ said I,
 ‘His way upon the waters,’ and drew nigh
 An ocean marge weed-strewn and foam-besprent;
 And the waves dashed on idle sand and stone,
 And very vacant was the long, blue sea;
 But in the evening as I sat alone,
 My window open to the vanishing day,
 Dear God! I could not choose but kneel and pray,
 And it sufficed that I was found of Thee.”²

It was just this which Jesus was continually doing for people—opening their eyes to hitherto unsuspected values and beauties and truths. Jesus saw nothing different, nothing not seen by all his contemporaries, by you and me. The lilies of the field and the birds of the air—they were the same lilies his companions brushed rudely aside with their heels, the same birds they unthinkingly threw stones at. Zaccheus, Mary Magdalene, the Woman at the Well—they were precisely the same people others saw as an unregenerate tax exactor, a common prostitute, a degenerate

² Edward Dowden, “Seeking God.”

drudge. He saw the same things; he simply saw them more deeply, more truly.

Life does not differ primarily in the facts it presents to us, but in the meaning we see in those facts; not in the experiences it holds for us, but in what we do with those experiences. There is much truth in the New Testament figure; God does stand at the door of every heart and knock. But this is a fact we discover in retrospect, not in prospect. It is seen as we look back over the course of our religious experience, not from its beginning. God forces Himself, His Will, His Love on no one. If you choose you may stuff your ears and be deaf to that knock, or you may raise such a clatter within that the knock is never heard. To those who will see Him, God reveals Himself in everything about them, in all the experiences which life brings to them. Whether you will see behind and through and at the base of it all spiritual meaning and spiritual foundation will depend upon the eyes of vision with which you look. If you can go out upon a clear night and gaze up at the vast starry fabric above and, stretching your imagination until it fairly aches with the stretching of it, realize that even then it fails to make a beginning at grasping what you see there, and still see behind it all nothing—no mind, no purpose, no meaning; if you can take the simplest flower and let your mind play on the beauty you see there, the simplicity and yet the incredible complexity, the intricate age-long developing process which has gone into the making of that flower, and see in that beauty and that process nothing—no meaning, no significance; if you can stand intelligently before any human being and understand the marvel and the mystery which have gone into the growth of a single cell into that life, and sense nothing

behind and in it all ; above all, if you can gaze into the face and through to the soul of anyone (I care not who it is, how unattractive, how unprivileged, whether it be your closest friend or the dirtiest ragamuffin on the street), and fail to discover there that bit of pure gold, that spark of God Himself which lies in the heart of everyone of us if we will but search and find it—then all I can say is, “God pity you! What you need is not fresh evidence of the companionship of God with you. What you need is to see aright the evidence already before you.”

“Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

“The angels keep their ancient places ;—
Turn but a stone and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendored thing.

“But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry ; and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross.

“Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry, clinging heaven by the hems ;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesaret, but Thames!”^a

3. But, if your life is throbbing with virile manhood or womanhood, it seeks some more certain, more substantial, more personal experience of God than has thus far been suggested—than the sense of God in beauty ; or the awe of

^a Francis Thomson, “The Kingdom of God.”

the Divine in the majesty of the Universe; or communion with God through meditation and study and prayer; or even the vision of God in human life at its best. I am convinced that in the vigor and practicalness and urgency of our youth we shall find God in quite another way—in *the heart of the world's work*.

For whatever else He may be, God is supremely a working God; that is what is meant by a living God. He is desperately in earnest about life and about the transformation of our world. Where shall we find Him save in His workshop, in the toil and struggle of making this world into the image of His Kingdom? There is something of this suggestion in Studdert Kennedy's lines:

"Then will He come—with meekness for His glory,
God in a workman's jacket as before,
Living again the Eternal Gospel Story,
Sweeping the shavings from His workshop floor."

So many and many a modern man and woman have found Him. To some the experience has come as a gradual realization as they have thrown themselves into the effort to relieve human need in the throbbing centers of humanity where we might suppose the vision of God would be dimmest—the city slums.

"Where cross the crowded ways of life,
Where sound the cries of race and clan
Above the noise of selfish strife,
We hear Thy voice, O Son of Man.

"In haunts of wretchedness and need,
On shadowed thresholds dark with fears,
From paths where hide the lures of greed,
We catch the vision of Thy tears." *

* Frank Mason North, "The City."

Others have found Him abroad, as they sought to carry what light had been given them to those who lacked their privileges and opportunities. To others God has become real in the leadership of the great moral causes of our day—the crusades against war and liquor and vice and crime, the crusade for a united world. Still others have found him through some humbler task—the care of illness or the nurture of little tots or the creation of a Christ-possessed home—wherever one can be sure the concern of God is enlisted, and feel the press of the hand of God with his own, the mingling of the tears of God in his sympathy, the joining of the exultation of God to his victory.

Fellowship with God, then, is not a social relationship to be enjoyed mutually, but a great task to be undertaken unitedly. It is an experience of partnership. I suspect that is what Jesus meant when he said, "Take my yoke upon you."⁵ Take upon your shoulder some part of the burden under the other half of which His shoulder ceaselessly toils and you will find Him as the Great Companion of life.

It is a glorious conception this, a conception for youth, that God is actually seeking and urging us to join with Him in the enterprise of making a new world; that the destiny of human life is not the living of a certain kind of life or the achieving of a certain kind of character or the attaining of some future celestial state, but the entering *now*, today, into a vital working partnership with the Author of Life Himself in the making of heaven on earth; that in some degree God cannot get his work done without us.

You recall the lines George Eliot put in the mouth of the great violin maker, Stradivarius:

⁵ Matthew 11:29.

"When any master holds
Twixt chin and hand a violin of mine,
He will be glad that Stradivari lived,
Made violins and made them of the best.
... For while God gives them skill
I give them instruments to play upon,
God choosing me to help him.
... If my hand slacked
I should rob God since he is fullest good—
Leaving a blank instead of violins.
... He could not make
Antonio Stradivari's violins
Without Antonio."

Look at the world as God looks at the world, and you must find Him in it. Look at men and women as He does—the poor and the prodigal, the ignorant and the haughty, your roommate and the foreigner—all of them as brothers of each other and brothers of yours and you will find the Father of whom they are all children. Look at the world as He does, not as an arena for self-expression and self-realization, not as a field on which you can hew out a business or intellectual or political or artistic career, but as a humanity to be served and redeemed; enlist your life, all of it for all time, in that great and eternal task in which His infinite love ceaselessly pours out its all; place love in the center of your spirit and sacrifice at the heart of your career and you will find abiding fellowship with Him who is Sacrificial Love.

4. There is still another way in which God becomes real in the life of many a man and woman. I hesitate to mention it only because I suspect it is an unknown land to most students. But if you will remember that this experience of God must come to us unsought and that it may come

early or late in life, or ~~not~~ at all, and if you will seek to find God for yourself where I have already suggested—in the throbbing heart of the world's life—I shall refer to it briefly. It is the experience of *being found by God*. A hint or two of it has occurred above. It is our recognition that God *does* stand at the door and knock. In our eager longing for fellowship with God, we forget that more eager and steadfast is His yearning for our companionship. In our hot pursuit of Him, we forget that He is tirelessly seeking us. But, sometimes, to some men the realization of this truth comes; there steals over their lives a warmth of the Divine Presence which cannot be resisted and they are "found of God." It is the experience to which Francis Thomson has given most familiar expression:

"I fled Him down the nights and down the days;
 I fled Him down the arches of the years;
 I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
 Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
 I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

.

(God speaks)
 "'Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee
 Save Me, save only Me?
 All which I took from thee, I did but take
 Not for thy harms,
 But just that thou mightst seek it in My arms.
 All which thy child's mistake
 Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
 Rise, clasp My hand and come!'

"Halts by me that footfall:
 Is my gloom, after all,
 Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?" *

* Francis Thomson, "The Hound of Heaven."

Dean Sperry likens our relationship with God to the throwing of a bridge across a stream from one bank to another, from the shore of our humanity to the shore of the Divine. And he reminds us that there are three ways in which the bridge may be constructed. We may begin on the hither bank and push out bit by bit into the stream, putting down piers into the bed of the river as we go; our structure will be an old-fashioned bridge. So many men try to form their relationship with God, building out tentatively from their human experience toward an immobile and indifferent opposite shore. But the bed of the stream is shifting; this is a precarious and uncertain method. Or we may conceive of our structure as a suspension bridge in which the cables are thrown across to us from the opposite bank and our part is merely to receive them and make them fast. So many men conceive of religion as an affair of God's initiation and our receptivity. But there is a third type of bridge, the cantilever. If we are to build it, construction is begun simultaneously from either end and the girders are pushed forth with equal zeal and speed from either side, until finally, directly over the center of the stream, a workman on each side reaches out, hands are joined, and the bridge is completed. So are we to think of our experience of God—as the building of a cantilever bridge. And, as in the metaphor, the hands which join are the hands of workmen, fellow workmen in a common task; but the worker from one bank bears no equipment to commend him other than the sincerity of his own moral earnestness, while the Worker from the far shore carries the unlimited resources of Eternal Love; and their common enterprise is the building of a Kingdom of friendly men.

CHAPTER VIII

POWER FOR LIFE—PRAYER

When a man comes face to face with Christ and with a vision of the life Christ believes it possible for him to lead, three things inevitably follow :

First, the experience enormously purifies and elevates his own ideal for himself—his vision of what God expects him to be and what, as a matter of fact, he might become.

Second, it greatly intensifies his realization of how far short he is now falling of a decent approach to what he might be—the smallness and unworthiness and failure of his own life.

Third, it creates in him a great passion to bridge that gap—a passion that the man he is should become that man he has seen so clearly in vision.

“O, that a man would arise in me,
That the man I am might cease to be.”

It is as though two mirrors had been held before him, the one revealing him precisely as he is, the other as he was made to be. From the contrast of those pictures, like the coming together of a positive and negative pole of electricity, there bursts a flame of desire to become worthy of his heritage. Quite likely it is at that point that a man's need for religion, his desire for power, of which we have spoken so often, first becomes real to him.

It is the thing today to say that a sense of sin has gone

out of our modern life; the word is disappearing from our vocabularies. That is only another way of saying that we have lost from our modern world any worthy conception of our own lives. No man can confront the ideal which his parents hold for his life—the ideal which was first conceived, I suppose, in the long days and weeks before his birth, which was fostered all through those trying years of childhood, the measles and the mumps and the first signs of contamination by the crowd and the youthful bravado of smoking and swearing, which was clung to tenaciously through the tense uncertainty of adolescence and early manhood, and which is still held today—no man can confront that ideal and then face the actualities of his own life without there stealing over him a shadowing sense of failure. What matters the praise of the world or the reassurance of friends when all the while in his parents' words, their eyes and especially in their hearts there stands an ideal a thousand times removed from what he now is? The man who so confronts another's hope for him is face to face with life's most redemptive human influence—the transforming power of persistent faith.

How much more true it is when the ideal which has caught hold of us is the ideal held for us in the mind of God—God's expectation of us. Then a sense of sin is no unhealthy morbidity, "a hangover from a more primitive religious age, to be discarded in our healthy modern view." The sense of sin is just a frank facing of the sharp facts of life's inescapable contrast—my life as it might be—my life as it now is.

When all this happens to a man, the query which possesses his mind is not, "what does it mean to be a Christian?" but, "how can I become that man?" He seeks no longer definition, but inspiration. "Yes, whenever I am

honest with myself, I recognize the difference between right and wrong. I acknowledge the truth of the Christian ideal. I see what I should do; but how can I get myself to face the right, how can I get myself to live it? I see the life I would live; how can I do it, where shall I get power for this life?"

Quite clearly, it is something more than ordinary human power we are sensing the need of and searching for. A generation ago, our parents would have said it was for some power outside ourselves, supernatural power. Today many of us shy off from both these expressions. We say we do not understand what is meant by supernatural power, that the power we seek comes from within. There has been altogether too much fuss about the use of these terms. Modern thought may have changed our terms, but it has not altered fundamental human experience. And it is religious experience of which we are speaking. As a matter of fact, it is just as inaccurate to say that that power comes wholly from within as that it comes wholly from without, to say that it is entirely natural as that it is entirely supernatural. What modern thinking has rightly done is to erase what was always an artificial line—the line between the natural and the supernatural, that point where the activity of the human spirit ends and the activity of God begins. The experience of religion remains unchanged. That experience through the ages has been that through religion it is possible to lay hold on power for living which life without religion does not possess. It is in that sense "super" power of some kind; you may call it super-normal or super-usual, if you choose.

There can be only one source of that power which we need. It is the more effective linking of our lives with the resources of God. For we must believe that our lives were

intended to possess power adequate for their full realization. If they fail to have it, it must be because in some sense they are out of touch with the life of God. The appropriation of that power is not the addition of something new and foreign to our spirits; it is the recovery of something which belongs to them by nature, as robust health is the natural possession of our physiques. It is the restoration of our lives to spiritual health.

How, then, is that more effective linkage of our lives with the Power of God to be effected? In the same two ways through which we come to know any human friend and so tap the resources of his friendship. By companioning with that friend, talking with him, living with him, through association coming to know his mind and heart, his hopes and his ambitions, his disappointments and his triumphs—through *the fellowship of comradeship*. And through joining that friend in some great task we have in common, laying our energies alongside his and toiling with him, shoulder to shoulder, by day and by night, through success and failure, to the accomplishment of a great undertaking—through *the fellowship of common effort*. The fellowship of comradeship is what we ought to mean by prayer.

If it be true that we are unsure today what we are to think about Christ, there is one other subject on which we find ourselves more uncertain—what we are to believe about prayer. This is far the more serious. Our difficulties in our thought of Christ ought not seriously to affect our practical relation to him. He remains the Guide of our thinking, the Companion of our striving, and, by the testimony of our experience, the Master of our life. But with prayer it is different. It is the practice of prayer, not

merely our ideas about it, which is affected by our uncertainty.

In passing, let us remind ourselves once more that we fail to pray, not primarily because we don't know what we believe or are troubled how to pray, but because we are not sufficiently in earnest about life. Physical weariness, sheer laziness, the fear of what roommate or friends might think, are more effective inhibitions to a true life of prayer than all the intellectual difficulties concocted by the skeptics of the ages. As always, our intellectual difficulties prove, on examination, to be majorly practical moral difficulties. But, when sincerity and a desire to develop our comradeship with God have been achieved, there still remain obstacles which seriously block us in the attainment of a deep and steady reality in prayer. These obstacles are three.

1. *We have come to know altogether too much about the way prayer works.* That is what modern psychology has done for us. It has laid bare the machinery of the spiritual life. It has introduced us to new conceptions—S-R bonds, autosuggestion, and others—conceptions which have stripped prayer of anything other than subjective usefulness and have taken from it the beauty and power as well as the mystery it once possessed, leaving it a stark and lifeless skeleton. We must not minimize this difficulty. When one goes for the first time behind the scenes of a theater and sees the mechanics of the play—the flimsy scenery, the crude lighting devices, the cheap stage expedients, the daubed paint, the cursing stage-hands—it is a disillusioning experience. As a matter of fact the truth or falsity of the drama thus portrayed has not changed one iota, but it seems to have lost its beauty and its meaning for us. When one first studies anatomy and sees the

details of the human frame revealed in all their coarseness and ugliness, it is a disillusioning experience. As a matter of fact, the mystery and grandeur and miracle of that indefinable which we call "life" are not diminished by one iota, rather greatly increased. But it seems to us that much of the meaning has gone from life, for we now know how it works. Some such experience of disillusionment many have felt with regard to prayer.

Let us be clear what psychology has done to prayer. It has described its operation; it has not explained the ultimate source of its power. To borrow the figure of another, the electric light comes along a wire and is manifested through a bulb. But that does not explain the light. Its ultimate source is a power-house. Disconnect the power-house, and the wire and the bulb have no meaning and no use. Moreover, when we have traced the current from the bulb along the wire to the power-house, there is still unexplained the one really important thing, that which makes the light—the nature of electricity itself. So it is with prayer. It must be judged not by the apparent source of its power nor by the mechanism through which power comes, but by the effects which it produces—its light in human life. *We have not "explained" away prayer until we have produced without it the fruits of prayer in human life.*

2. There is a second and a more real difficulty—we live in a world which does not pray. The influence of this fact upon our lives cannot be exaggerated; far more than we care to admit, we take the temper of our spiritual lives from the dominant religious life about us and he is indeed a powerful personality who keeps his own prayer strong and real in the midst of a society which does not pray. Surely the fact itself requires no proof. Our modern

world may believe in prayer, but it does not pray. It may find prayer rational (I believe its best thinking does), but it does not find prayer real. Many people may say prayers, but few really pray. It is no easy task to live in an atmosphere where prayer is theoretically affirmed but practically denied. The natural and full development of our comradeship with God is unconsciously estopped by the pressure of the conventional.

3. Finally, we do not pray because *we do not know precisely what to expect of prayer*. Once more we confront the result of "modern thought," the new way of thinking which has given so much to our conception of religion but which, with all its contribution, has taken from us certain values indispensable for religion's health. Modern thought has not taken God away from us, a God who is personal and living. But it has brought God down from some far-distant heaven and placed Him at the active center of human life. We now see His presence everywhere, in beauty, in the flowers, in natural law, in spiritual law, in high moral idealism, in every noble act of our fellows. There is great gain in that. God ceases to be a gigantic Potentate on a majestic eminence. He becomes a Living Spirit active work through all His world. There is great gain; but there is some loss, too. God, being everywhere in general, is nowhere in particular. Men used to point to definite acts of God. They would say, "God directed me to do so and so." "This is God's act; that is man's." The demarkation between the divine and human was clear. Now that line has disappeared. We no longer say, "God did this, or that. God directed me to do so and so." We no longer feel the direct imprint of God's power and love and guidance on our lives. We believe in a God who acts, but we do not know specifically where He acts.

And, not knowing definitely where He acts, we might almost as well disbelieve in His activity altogether. A machine which is built to run but remains always idle soon becomes unfit to run. A God who is believed to exercise personal activity but is never known definitely to do so soon ceases to be a living force in His world.

At no point is this weakness in current conceptions of God so evident and so serious as in our belief in prayer. We still believe it is a good thing to pray. It puts us into communion with the great "spiritual forces" in the Universe. It quiets and steadies and empowers our spirits. It opens our lives to the direction of God's Spirit which is making itself felt through His purpose in history, through our own consciences, through the accumulated spiritual heritage of the race. But when we are asked what prayer accomplishes apart from self-suggestion or in what living sense God speaks to us through prayer, we do not know. We do believe that prayer accomplishes more than the subjective inspiration of him who prays. But what? How? We are not sure. The plain truth is that we seem less sure of God than of our nearest neighbor. And so prayer tends to be no longer the intimate fellowship of two friendly spirits, the fellowship through which the world's most potent work is done.

If you will analyze your own thinking, you will discover a large part of your genuine difficulties concerning prayer rooted here. We must not seek an answer to the problem. That is a task for the theologians, for it is essentially a problem in our conception of God. I believe it to be—this question of the activity of God—the most fundamental and vital problem in the whole range of contemporary religious thinking, the problem which lies behind the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy and all the rest. We

may suggest that the solution which the theologians may ultimately reach will in no sense affect the fundamental validity of prayer as a living experience and a living power. For a God who is the Living God whom we have pictured is One with whom we may know the intimate comradeship which is prayer. During the interim until our thinking is more adequately clarified, our course is to place even stronger reliance on the authority we so reluctantly trust, the validity of prayer's meaning in experience. This difficulty is part of the challenge of the present religious situation, that through adventuring in the experience of prayer we may hew out an answer to the problem.

How, then, can one make more real in his own life the experience of the comradeship of God?

First of all, by broadening and deepening the conception of what prayer is. In spite of the increasing emphasis on Worship in recent years, to too many of us prayer is still the mere asking things from God—a monologue of pleading, more like the child's note to Santa Claus at Christmas season than the great and deep communion of two free and loving spirits. The prayer which asks is only one aspect of the experience of comradeship, though an important aspect. And it is an aspect which should come late in the prayer experience, following on the simpler and more elementary forms of prayer.

For prayer, in the first instance, is *elevation*. It is the lifting of the whole life up to a higher level, a level where the spirit is refreshed, the personality unified and the horizons of spiritual vision cleared. That is always the first thing prayer does for us. And it is the first thing our lives need.

Secondly, prayer is *illumination*. It is the atmosphere

in which and the means by which the Will of God for us becomes clear. We should understand that our praying cannot change God's Purpose; but it can reveal it to us. It makes no particular difference how this experience of illumination is explained. This is one of the points where it is futile as well as impossible to seek to mark off the action of God from the suggestion of our own minds. We shall never know the freedom which true prayer requires until we cease wondering where God's part ends and our own part begins, until we see in the whole experience an interweaving of threads human and divine so intricate as to defy analysis. It is the fact of our experience which is important. And our experience is that our minds are befuddled, we cannot see clearly the decision which must be made or the course we must pursue, we lift our problem into the spirit of purified and earnest prayer, we rise from prayer to find our minds quieted and the things to do shown clearly before us.

Thirdly, prayer is "*energation*." It is the source of new strength for ourselves. To many this is the heart of the prayer experience. Here again explanation is of minor importance. We know that through prayer we are able for things otherwise impossible. And we know that this fact of our experience alone would fully justify the centrality of prayer in our philosophy. "Who rises from his knees a better man, his prayer is answered."

There follows immediately still another meaning—prayer as *intercession*, the source of strength for others. It is here that most of our intellectual difficulties focus. Down through the centuries, the firm belief of religion has been that through my prayers there might be made available in another life comfort and power and love which otherwise it would not have known. But in this new world

of scientific law, psychological as well as physical, how can we longer believe in the efficacy of intercessory prayer? To this question we have no clear cut answer as yet. Recent scientific investigations especially with their emphasis on the credibility of thought transference have tended to help rather than baffle us in our problem. Increasingly science is pointing us to a Universe vibrant with mental and spiritual currents, a Universe in which the impact of personality upon personality seems less and less the slave of time and space. Possibly it is most helpful to conceive that we live in a spiritual economy in which, just as in the physical world, no energy is ever lost, no cause is without its effect, no current of influence is ever started which does not reach its mark. One imagines a law of the conservation of spiritual energy. One conceives prayer to be the supreme energy of that spiritual economy. And because it is an economy (an ordered system governed by dependable law) prayer must fall within the laws of the economy. Such a view of prayer rules out at once all those extravagances which have made intercessory prayer a travesty and have shattered men's confidence in the reasonableness of one of the noblest impulses of the human spirit—the desire to pray for the welfare of someone else in the surety that prayer matters. No prayer, however well-meaning, which runs counter to God's Purpose can effect its end, for it violates the fundamental law of the spiritual Universe. But it is altogether reasonable to suppose that it is written into the very structure of the spiritual economy in which we live that prayer should be its supreme energizing force. When a pure and consecrated spirit throws the full power of its aspiration and desire in behalf of the best interest of another life and along the lines of God's high hope for that life, something is accom-

plished which can be accomplished in no other way. The well-nigh universal testimony of those who have understood the mysterious depths of the spiritual life most fully would confirm this view to which scientific thinking is pointing us.

"The privilege of prayer to me is one of the most cherished possessions, because faith and experience alike convince me that God himself sees and answers, and his answers I never venture to criticize. It is only my part to ask. It is entirely his to give or withhold, as he knows is best. If it were otherwise, I would not dare to pray at all. In the quiet of the home, in the heat of life and strife, in the face of death, the privilege of speech with God is inestimable. I value it more because it calls for nothing that the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot give—that is, the simplest expression of his simplest desire. When I can neither see, nor hear, nor speak, still I can pray so that God can hear. When I finally pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I expect to pass through it in conversation with him."¹

Finally, we must think of prayer as *cooperation*. Together with thinking and working, it is a method of our cooperation with God, possibly the highest method of the three. This is implicit in our belief in a moral Universe in which God is purposing good and we, by laying the dedication and energies of our lives alongside His, may actually cooperate with Him in the achievement of His purposes. "As we consider prayer at the level at which it becomes a channel of creative power, most of the difficulties which surround its more elementary aspects will be resolved. . . . We see that prayer, so far from being a tiresomely-reiterated asking, based upon a conception of God that belongs to the childhood of the race, is the high-

¹ Wilfred T. Grenfell.

est and most dynamic form of interaction between the human and the divine. It is the whole personality—intellect as well as emotion and will—energizing in fellowship with the Lord of all life.”^a

A second hint in the making of prayer more real is the broadening and deepening of one's practice of prayer. “How shall I pray?” one is often asked. “In two ways,” I would reply. First of all, prayer should be natural, spontaneous, occasional. Pray when you feel like it and where you feel like it and as you feel like it. There is no aspect of the spiritual life where one may so safely follow his intuition as here. Remember that prayer, in its simplest form, is just the natural bubbling over of the free spirit—in gratitude, in penitence, in concern, in desire, in adoration. Henry Ward Beecher is quoted as saying, “I pray on the principle that the wine knocks the cork out of the bottle. There is an inward fermentation and there must be a vent.” This is the raw material of the higher forms of comradeship. A friend of mine says that he finds himself doing much of his praying as he travels back and forth in the New York subways. Possibly it is because he has no other way to occupy his time; possibly, also, because the rush and crush and din of this symbol of modern civilization drive him to seek refuge from the paganism it represents. We must recover for the health of our spirits this spontaneous, unordered expression of their life.

But that is only half of the practice of prayer. In the second place, prayer should be ordered, disciplined, regular. This is absolutely necessary. Like any other steady, useful habit of life, prayer requires a definite time each day set apart and faithfully guarded. Our naïveté in this

^a E. Herman, “Creative Prayer,” p. 34.

matter is really astounding. We expect the principles which we recognize and faithfully obey in every other region of life to be inoperative here, in life's most delicate and difficult experience. If we gave as little attention to the care of our bodies as we give to the care of our spirits, we should find ourselves in a hospital within a month. Yes, the achievement of a satisfying and steady inner experience requires cultivation at once conscientious and thoughtful. We shall have to feel our own way. We shall have to discover what time of day best meets our need. We shall have to discover what method is most natural for us. We shall want to experiment in the use of the prayers of others.³ But, finally, through the processes of experimentation we must come to the experience where prayer is woven into the fabric of our habits, an unconscious part of the fullness of life.

Still another hint is the suggestion that each one of us must discover his own pathway into the presence of God. We should make use to the full limit of our ability of the experience of others, through books of prayers, through personal advice and through joining others in corporate worship. But, when all possible help has been derived thus, each individual soul must find his way to God by himself. Professor Whitehead is right when he says that true religion begins in solitariness. One wishes that we could help students and many, many others in the churches to see and believe that fact. The progress of the life of our spirits is much like that of our passage from youth to maturity. We begin in a relationship of dependence. We draw our ideas from others, we lean upon others for support, we cannot "go up into the presence of the Lord" except as others lead us by the hand. But there comes the

³ See Bibliography, pp. 145-149.

day in every man's religious growth when that must stop. Gathering all he can of helpfulness from friends into his own experience, he must set out on the seeking of his own pathway; and he must set out *alone*. On that day his religious experience really begins. For on that day for the first time, God as the intimate and private Acquaintance of his own life becomes his personal possession. Better to have advanced a dozen steps on the pathway of one's own religious experience than a hundred miles down the pathway of another. From that time forth, there is a sense in which he treads a solitary way. He shares some experiences with others. All his own experiences he seeks to make clear to them. But there is about them a quality which cannot be shared. In a peculiar way they are his personal possession which no one else can wholly comprehend. He now begins to know God as the peculiar Friend of his own life. His experience is somewhat like that of a woodsman breaking a new trail through dense forests. To the right and left of him he hears the sound of his companions' axes. He knows they are going over much the same course he is—through the same underbrush, into the same ravines, up the same sharp ascents. They are headed toward the same goal. Occasionally he catches a glimpse of one or another through the woods. He calls to them and receives a hearty call in reply. But he never clearly sees them and they never join him on his trail. Although they pursue closely parallel courses to the same destination, each woodsman hews out his own path.

Finally, if we would find the resources we seek in prayer, one further condition is to be met. The life of prayer must be organic to life as a whole. We must not think of prayer as a special exercise set apart for a special

time and circumstance, a peculiar experience existing by itself and only distantly related to the humdrum of our ordinary living. We shall need to remind ourselves constantly that it is our *life* which is our real prayer and that those phases of living to which we have given the distinctive name of prayer have value for us and recognition before the face of God just to the extent that they are of the same cloth as the life from which they spring. Their test must be in the results they show in the press of life. "The one important question is whether the meditation will stand the wear and tear of common life. If it appears fanciful and visionary, once we have reached the office and plunged into the day's business, it was a failure, no matter how it made our hearts to glow at the time. No meditation is really valid unless it leaves us with something to which we can return during the day's business and find it helpful there." * With the fellowship of comradeship must go the fellowship of common effort.

And it is the worth of our common living which, in the last analysis, shall determine how far down that solitary pathway of spiritual exploration we shall go; or, to change the figure, how steady and how permanent shall be our enjoyment of the Divine Comradeship. A writer who has achieved much in understanding the deeper secrets of the religious life has put it thus: "Prayer is, in the last resort, worth exactly as much—or as little—as the man behind it. . . . For prayer is the expression of a life. It rises out of a hinterland which determines its quality. . . . From beginning to end, it is the presuppositions behind prayer that we need to be chiefly concerned about. Let the *law* of prayer be observed, and its *method* can take care of itself. 'The mark of a saint,' Bishop Westcott reminds

* E. Herman, "Creative Power," p. 80.

us, 'is not perfection but consecration. A saint is not a man without faults, but a man who has given himself without reserve to God.' And, rightly understood, one act of self-surrender can make a saint. Here is our only true wisdom in prayer, and here the only method that is of universal application." ⁵

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 130.

CHAPTER IX

POWER FOR LIFE—SERVICE

When a man comes face to face with Christ and with a vision of the life Christ believes it possible for him to lead, three things inevitably follow: the experience enormously purifies and elevates his own ideal for himself, it greatly intensifies his realization of how far short he is now falling of a decent approach to what he might be, it creates in him a great passion to bridge that gap—a passion that the man he is should become that man he has seen so clearly in vision.

That is the first thing which contact with Christ is likely to do for a man. But that is not the whole story. To come really face to face with him also brings home upon us a similar realization regarding the world. First, a new vision of what this corporate human life of ours might be if men would live as God intended they should and as they are perfectly capable of living, as brothers and sisters, the relationships of life dominated by cooperation, trust, and mutual regard. Second, an awakening to the hopelessly cheap imitation the life of our world today is, with its materialism, its jealousy, its pettiness, its strife, its selfishness, its sin. Third, a great surging desire to enlist in the job of making over the life of society into the brotherhood of men it might and should be. The vision of this world as it might be—that is precisely what we mean by the Kingdom of God. The facing of the world

as it is—that is precisely what we mean by “conviction of sin,” corporate and personal. The enlistment of life in the task of transformation—that is precisely what we mean by Christian consecration. That is the source of the challenge to service.

On one point we want to be very clear—that the impelling, inescapable challenge to us to throw ourselves wholly into the turmoil of the world’s life in service does not rest necessarily on our religious belief or our religious experience. This thing which contact with Christ does for us is to bring before our consciousness with a fresh vividness a challenge which was already there. That absolute compulsion to the dedication of life arises from two sources—the sheer facts of human need in the world and the instinct within us to respond to that need. If you walk down the street and see a child stumble and fall into the gutter, without a moment’s thought something within you pushes you forward to lift that child. If you hear that an atrocious violence has been done to a fine, pure girl, something within you rises up to protect her, to punish the violator. If you see a friend, especially someone of whom you are very fond, throwing away his possibilities in drunkenness or foolish dissipation or utter frivolity, something within you moves not only to prevent his foolishness, but to use every possible means to bring to the surface and to dominance in his life the possibilities now being wasted there.

That is the compulsion to service, as natural and intuitive and inevitable as one of the instincts of our make-up. But, it may be asked, what has all this to do with giving one’s whole life in service, for instance with the determination of one’s lifework? Everything! The decision of one’s lifework on the Christian basis and the consecration

of one's whole life to Christ are simply the governing of life's major choices by that noble impulse which is innate in our natures.

What is the life of the world but the life of the individual writ large? What are those illustrations of individual human need but parables of our corporate life? Only the poverty of our imaginations prevents our seeing it so. There is the child stumbling into the gutter—for our humanity when viewed with perspective is hardly more than an overgrown child, stumbling along, confused and blind, not knowing whither it is going, likely at no distant future to fall into the gutter of civilization's collapse. The former British ambassador to the United States put it thus, "In Europe we know that an age is dying. Here in America it would be easy to miss the signs of coming change, but I have little doubt that it will come. A realization of the aimlessness of life lived to labor and to die having achieved nothing but avoided starvation, and of the birth of children also doomed to the weary treadmill, has seized the minds of millions."¹ There is the wronged girl—literally, in our problems of immorality, drink, prostitution, and all the rest, but far more compelling in the vast masses of humanity—men, women, little children, all ages and types and classes—sadly wronged, born into the world with less than a fraction of decent opportunity for living. There is the foolish friend—could there be any truer picture of life in our day than a humanity wasting divine possibilities in mad folly and degenerating dissipation?

The two mirrors reveal to us a contrast which no honest man can refuse to confront, a contrast which has in it the right to determine your life and mine. Here is the actu-

¹ Sir Auckland Geddes.

ality—a society split into thousands of jostling and jealous fragments, cleavages by race, by nation, by wealth, by class, by birth, by social stigma, by faith, its life all too largely permeated with fear and envy and strife. Here is the possibility—a glorious fellowship of friendly and cooperative men and women. What fools we mortals are! Was there ever more arrant nonsense than the world we have made for ourselves? Could there ever be a more impelling summons to a full gift of life?

Men talk about feeling no call to service. As long as one family in your home town tonight goes to bed without food and clothing and opportunity adequate for its need; as long as one woman walks the streets of New York or St. Louis or Los Angeles, bartering her body and her rarest possession, her womanhood, for the cash of men like ourselves, our brothers; as long as there is a corner of the earth's surface where the Kingdom of God has not yet begun to reign—so long is there an absolute and inescapable obligation upon us to give ourselves wholly and for all time in the service of others.

Let us bring it a trifle closer home. As long as there is a student on your campus who is cut to the quick by the cold shoulder of exclusion; as long as there is an election dominated by fraternity politics or a classroom permeated with dishonesty; as long as there is one student on your campus who is wasting the glories of the possibilities which are in him through foolishness or aimlessness or vice—so long there rests upon us an absolute obligation to give all that we have in the life of the campus here and now to make that life over into what it might be. We may refuse if we choose, but let us not say that we fail to see the obligation resting upon us; for, if our imaginations are quickened at all, there has arisen before us a twofold

view—a realization of that campus as it is, a vision of that campus as it might be. And, if the spirit of Christ has been allowed to get a fraction of a hold upon our minds, there is growing within us a desire to throw all that we are into the solving of that contrast.

What are some of the implications of this challenge to service?

First of all, there is the implication in the use of our life and our time right now—the things on the campus within and without the curriculum to which we shall give ourselves; the time various campus activities shall demand; the attitude we shall take up toward every fighting issue—toward fraternities, toward the R. O. T. C., toward campus honesty, toward athletics, toward campus morality; the value we shall place on those things which the campus holds most dear—long strings of honors in the yearbook, a chainful of charms, ability to swing elections, campus-wide popularity, the label of “campus leader.”

Second, and of much greater importance, is the implication for the determination of where our whole life shall be enlisted, our lifework decision. There is no possibility of overstressing the importance of the choice of lifework. First, its importance for ourselves. We like to think that we are masters of our fates and captains of our souls, the free and autonomous makers of our own characters. As a rule, the younger we are, the more naïvely and confidently do we hold to that view. But the more one studies life the more untrue this philosophy appears. Study three men from the same home town and the same home atmospheres who go off to colleges of quite different types, a large city university, a small denominational school, a state teachers' college. Four years later you meet three entirely

different men molded beyond any possibility of their realization by the atmosphere of their college experience. Or, better still, study three men coming from the same college and the same general backgrounds with much the same habits and characters and even objectives, who enter quite different vocations, one to become a bond salesman on Wall Street, one to take up literary work on a prominent monthly, one to enter the Christian ministry. Five years later they meet to discover that they hardly know each other. They no longer read the same books, they no longer talk about the same things, they no longer hold the same ideals and objectives. They have been molded beyond any possibility of their realization by the atmosphere of their several jobs. It is not true that we are masters of our fates and captains of our souls. It is true that for the most part we are masters of the few great choices of our lives, the choices of the environmental influences which are to mold us; these choices, once made, are the masters of our fates. This places almost the central importance in life where it belongs, on the few great choices of molding atmospheres. Far more than we are willing to admit, the man is a mirrored reflexion of these influences. And of these, the first permanent choice and almost the most important of all is our vocational atmosphere, the choice of our life work.

It is of incalculable importance to us. But it is of incalculable importance to the world, also. There is much current talk to the effect that it makes no difference to the world what job a man chooses. "Can't you be a Christian in any job? It doesn't make any difference what you do, provided you live and work according to Christian principles." How obviously absurd! Could one say that Thomas Edison would have been as great a servant of

mankind had he been a drug-store clerk, mixing ice-cream sodas with the same thoroughness and efficiency with which through the years he has sought to master nature's secrets? Could one say that Harry Emerson Fosdick would be as useful to the world were he a street-car conductor, ringing up fares with the same earnestness and consecration with which he now interprets truth for men? Especially if soda-water clerks and street-car conductors happened to be a drug on the labor market. It is of incalculable importance to the world where the energies and consecration of our lives are to be enlisted.

How, then, shall that decision be made? If you were able to analyze your own mind, you would discover two main considerations struggling for first place in the determination of your decision. They correspond to the two great theories of lifework choice. One approach starts with yourself. It says, measure your own capacities. Evaluate and ask others to evaluate your greatest aptitudes. Study your own deepest interests and desires. What do you most *want* to do? Find that place in the world where those aptitudes will fit best, those interests and desires will find fullest expression. In brief, do the thing which you can do best.

But there is another theory, held by a few. It starts with the world. Measure the world's need, it says. Evaluate the great movements and the pressing problems of your day. Study what most needs to be done in the world, where men of character and consecration and moderate ability are most needed on the firing line of the world's struggle. Then see if your life will not fit there; if so, that is the place for you.

There ought to be no necessary antithesis between these two approaches, it is true. And they have been thrown

into sharp contrast in order that we may see them the more clearly. But in all too many of us there is a real antithesis. If you know the working of your mind and are ruthlessly honest with yourself, you will discover that you are approaching the question with one or the other consideration dominant. Have you ever taken a piece of green cloth and looked at it under the artificial light of a store window and then taken it for examination out under the white light of the sun? The color appears almost wholly different. So it is with this great determining decision of our life's vocation, whether we view it in the light of our own desires and our own abilities, or whether we view it under the white light of our world's need. It is the difference between "the thing we can do best" and "the best thing we can do."

If our thought concerning the challenge to service is correct, there can be only one major consideration guiding our thinking as we face this decision. Not "where will I fit best? where will I get ahead fastest? what am I best qualified to succeed at?" but "where am I needed most? where can my talents serve best? where is the spot in this gigantic adventure of making over the world where I can count for most?" Not willingness to remold life in accordance with the truth you see, but *eagerness* so to remold life. That is the principle we used during the War. Of few men of the American army could it have been said that soldiering was the thing they could do best. They were good farmers and salesmen and dentists, but most of them were mighty poor soldiers. But under the stress of what we thought to be the nation's emergency, we did feel that the best thing they could do was to fight. If those principles were sound in the crisis of the War, how much more in the crisis of this peace! The differ-

ence is this: then it was a principle of conscription, now it is a principle of voluntary enlistment.

Let it not be thought that such a decision is sacrificial; in the larger view, it is a selfish decision, for there is only one place in the world where a man can know true happiness and the deepest satisfaction. It is that place in which he has the inner assurance that his life is counting for most in the glorious undertaking of transforming the world as it is into the world as it might be. Many and many a man who has dared so to choose his lifework would rise up to say that through that type of decision he has found himself and life.

There is a *third implication* of the challenge to service—the relation we are to have to certain human institutions and activities. I think especially of the Church. Men ask why they should be interested in the Church. "What has the Church to give me? Why should I support the Church?" One might reply, "The question 'What has the Church to give me?' has no point at all. If you are going into it for that reason, stay out; there are too many self-centered spiritual sponges in our churches already. As a matter of fact, the Church has a very great deal to give you. You need it and need it desperately. But you will discover neither your need nor its gift with your present attitude."

To him who views life's problems in the light of the world's need, not his own desires, the great question is, "What is the place of the Church in this picture of which we have been speaking?" Is the Church a constructive or a destructive influence in society? If constructive, then despite all its weaknesses which you fully realize, you throw your resources into it, for it is, on the whole, in the same enterprise in which you have invested everything;

you are partners in the same job. Is the Church a necessary institution? Must mankind always have a Church? Has it an essential place in your ideal for society? If the answer is "Yes," then, not despite its weaknesses but because of its weaknesses, it deserves all you have of loyalty and support and effort—for the redemption of the Church is then part of your life task of the redemption of the world. What is true of our attitude to the Church must be true of our relation to all other constructive organizations and movements looking toward the New Day.

And the answer to these questions is "Yes." This is a task which we shall not accomplish alone. It is humanity's job, this remaking of the world; and it must be done by groups working together. We have spoken of the resources of power through fellowship with God. Here there comes power into life through the linkage of our life with the resources of men. It is the fellowship of cooperation, of common effort. So only can the New Day come.

It is for this reason that we must always have a Church. Those who talk glibly about the impending disappearance of the Church know no more about history and the fundamental nature of human life than a wharf rat about the construction of an ocean liner. We must always have a Church, not because the leaders of religion have told us so nor because it is an age-old tradition of mankind from which we cannot free ourselves, nor even because individual worshippers must have it for the nurture of their personal lives; we must always have a Church because the spiritual fellowship which is "humanity as it might be" can be brought into reality only through organized common effort, and shall be preserved only through the common worship and common service of like-dedicated men.

The Church of today, feeble as it is, is the best foretaste we have of the Kingdom which shall be. It is for this reason that we align ourselves with the Church. We come to see that a Church *does* have an essential place in human life and we enlist in the existing Church as part of our general task of helping to create the ideal institutions mankind needs. But a strange thing happens to us. As we throw our energies into this feeble and despised institution, we awake to the realization that beneath its apparent feebleness there are hidden powers we had never suspected, powers which in some mysterious way seem to have source-springs far down in the depths of reality. We discover that it is doing for us far greater things than we are doing for it, that there are within us desires and needs we had not recognized and which this weak reed which we had thought to bolster with our strength has the power to meet. We enlisted in the Church because we thought it needed us; we carry on because we know we need it.

These are some of the implications of service in terms of duty. But there are implications, too, in terms of success in the living of life.

1. *In the life of service, and in it alone, is to be found the life we seek.* The great words of today are self-fulfillment and self-realization. We all recognize the restless yearning for life among us, and we think that through self-realization we shall find that elusive thing, happiness—and so life. Yet I find some, at least, of our student group who have gone beyond that. They are sick to death of this search for self-fulfillment, sick of themselves and of thinking about themselves and of seeking their own self-realization. It is themselves which they want to forget. I have heard many and many of them say, "If only

something would come along big enough to pull us out of ourselves. What a relief that would be!" It is the disillusionment which must ultimately overtake all who follow the self-realization path. They are on the edge of discovering the secret of life.

It was no chance which led Jesus persistently, almost tiresomely, to put the emphasis on "doing." He spoke much of faith and some of what we should think about God. But he put the heart of his teaching and the climax of his emphasis *always* upon doing. That is the way he concluded his great teaching discourse, the Sermon on the Mount—"Not every man who says to me 'Lord, Lord!' will get into the Realm of heaven, but he who *does* the will of my Father in heaven." That is the acid test of the Sermon. "The man who hears these words of mine and *does* them is like a sensible man who built his house on rock."² And that is the way he concluded the teaching of his entire ministry, for the passage which is probably the last public word Jesus ever said, in a very real sense the conclusion of his thinking, is a parable in which he states categorically those who will and those who will not win entrance to the Kingdom of heaven.³ What is it which determines men's destinies? What they believe? or what they profess? No. Those who have seen men in need—hungry, thirsty, wandering, naked, sick, in trouble with the law—and have *done* something about it, these are the ones who enter. That is the final test put to men; no other.

Jesus put his persistent emphasis here because he understood the unchanging laws of our natures which are rooted in the depths of our beings. We are by nature active beings. We are put here not primarily to think out phi-

² Matthew 7:21-27.

³ Matthew 25:31 f..

losophies or to enjoy fellowships, but to do a task. In the doing of that task we find life; through the doing of it, Jesus says, we enter the Kingdom of God. Life carries at its very heart a paradox. Of the sayings of Jesus that which was on his lips more frequently than any other was, "The man who tries to save his life loses it; he who loses his life for a great cause finds it." ⁴ The world, most of us, most of our current undergraduate philosophy say, "Jesus was wrong." The restless dissatisfaction which is the issue of all this self-seeking should prove who is wrong.

Twenty years ago, a brilliant young Alsatian scholar still in his late twenties published a book which stirred the religious world more deeply than any other since Darwin's "Origin of Species." It is still one of the most radical and disturbing interpretations of Jesus in print. Men said it would destroy the Christian faith if its conclusions were adopted. The author, who is an organist of first rank and our greatest living authority on the music of Bach, is undeniably one of the most brilliant minds of today. A few years later, the world was startled to hear that he had given up his chair of theology, had completed a course in medicine, had raised funds to equip a hospital, had left all the associations and opportunities of his academic life and had gone to the heart of Africa in one of the most dangerous posts known to medicine to minister to victims of the deadly sleeping-sickness fever. Why? He tells of it very simply in these words:

"It became steadily clearer to me that I had not the inward right to take as a matter of course my happy youth, my good health, and my power of work. Out of the depths of my feeling of happiness there grew up grad-

⁴ Mark 8:35, etc.

ually within me an understanding of the saying of Jesus that we must not treat our lives as being for ourselves alone. Whoever is spared personal pain must feel himself called to help in diminishing the pain of others. We must all carry our share of the misery which lies upon the world. . . . I had read about the physical miseries of the natives in the virgin forests; I had heard about them from missionaries, and the more I thought about it the stranger it seemed to me that we Europeans trouble ourselves so little about the great humanitarian task which offers itself to us in far-off lands. The parable of Dives and Lazarus seemed to me to have been spoken directly to us! . . . Moved by these thoughts, I resolved, when already thirty years old, to study medicine and put my ideas to the test out there.”⁵

The result? He writes this from his primitive mission hospital in the heart of the primeval forest:

“The operation is finished, and in the hardly lighted dormitory I watch for the sick man’s awakening. Scarcely has he recovered consciousness when he stares about him and ejaculates again and again: ‘I have no more pain! I have no more pain!’ His hand feels for mine and will not let it go. Then I begin to tell him and the others who are in the room that it is the Lord Jesus who has told the doctor and his wife to come to the Ogowe, and that white people in Europe give them money to live here and cure the sick negroes. Then I have to answer questions as to who these white people are, where they live, and how they know that the natives suffer so much from sickness. The African sun is shining through the coffee bushes into the dark shed, but we, black and white, sit side by side and

⁵ Albert Schweitzer, “Memoirs of Childhood and Youth,” p. 82; “On the Edge of the Primeval Forest,” pp. 1, 2.

feel that we know by experience the meaning of the words: 'And all ye are brethren. . . .'

"To those who go among the colored people of their own accord and are willing to put up with all that is meant by absence from home and civilization, I can say from experience that they will find a rich reward for all they renounce in the good that they can do." *

Today Albert Schweitzer is not only one of the greatest minds in all the world; he is possibly the greatest Christian in all the world. Life has come to him by losing it.

We do not forget ourselves *in order to* find life. That defeats its own purpose. We forget ourselves because every noble impulse within urges us to do so. We forget ourselves and we do find life, for it is written into the nature of the Universe itself that the fullness of the life we seek is an inevitable and unsought byproduct of the kind of life we should lead.

2. *Through the life of service and through it alone is to be found linkage with the resources of God.*

Let it not be thought for one instant that what we have called the life of service is an easy undertaking, that through it we come quickly and readily into the fullness of life. The spirit of youth in our age is too realistic for such self-deception. If it be true that as we step out upon this path of the absolute commitment of ourselves we first begin to know "life," it is also true that with that first step onto the path of service we first encounter the real adversaries of life.

Then it is that for the first time honest doubt harasses us. How can it be that in a world so largely consecrated to the sacredness of "things" a Purpose of Good for the transformation of that world is working itself out tri-

* *Op. cit.*, pp. 93, 173.

umphantly? How can we understand that this unmerited suffering and that flagrant injustice and this crushing frustration of noble self-giving can be encompassed within an Infinite Love? If God be ever more ready to hear than we to pray and wont to do more than we desire or deserve, then why is it so difficult to be certain of Him in life's crises, why is He so reticent in making available to us, as we battle on, the certainty of his Support and the resources of his Power? The true intellectual difficulties of religion begin. And we know that life is a struggle for faith.

Then it is that idealism's most dangerous enemy—disillusionment—confronts us. We pass from the buoyant confidence of youth into the deadening discouragement of experience. I would not for one moment minimize this experience of disillusionment. I have seen too many of the very best of our college youth year after year come out from graduation into the turmoil of the world's life with high vision and genuine consecration and then slowly slip into discouragement, then disillusionment, then defeat, then the cynical or kindly complacency which is the world's dominant philosophy, engulfed by powers of conventional indifference which they were wholly unprepared to meet. Too often we have sent men and women out with the enthusiasm of idealism in their hearts, but with no understanding of the tedious processes by which that idealism is to be translated into reality, with no fine tempering of the soul which alone can meet and defeat life's disillusionments. Be sure that if we take seriously this vision for our world which has possessed us, if the committal of our life to God's comradeship in the molding of His Kingdom becomes the passion of our spirits, then an experience of discouragement if not disillusionment lies before us. Many and many a time our hearts will cry out silently

with Bernard Shaw's St. Joan, "O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?" And we know that life is a struggle for courage.

Then it is that we begin to understand the meaning of the Cross. The pathway of service will prove, *if* we follow that pathway through to its end, not to make life unintelligible but to make it profoundly intelligible. It will not separate us from God; ultimately it will bring us to God. For as the frustration and disappointment and perplexity which lie across that path meet us face to face, we shall find ourselves unconsciously turning more and more to Another who went the same pathway. We shall discover that in the words which he said and the spirit which he breathed there seems to be deeper meaning than we had ever realized, meaning which begins to make the whole course of that puzzling pathway intelligible. We shall find the footsteps of our imagination, quite unconsciously and driven by some inner compulsion, taking their way through a city's busy streets and out through its gates to a lonely hill without; we shall discover ourselves standing at the foot of the Cross. And as we stand there, there will come over us as there have come over multitudes who have stood there before us certain convictions which we sense but which we may find it very difficult to rationalize—that a mysterious principle which we see most clearly from the foot of the Cross is woven into the very fabric of this Universe, that it is through the kind of self-giving we see there that life and the world are transformed, that the experiences of pain and disappointment and defeat which have become so real to us are in some sense experiences of God Himself, that "the Cross is a projection on the screen of history of what takes place in the heart of

God all the time.”⁷ We meet God at the foot of the Cross. Then we understand why the Cross stands at the center of Christianity. Then we say further with Joan, “France is alone; and God is alone; and what is my loneliness before the loneliness of my country and my God? I see now that the loneliness of God is His strength; what would He be if He listened to your jealous little counsels? Well, my loneliness shall be my strength too; it is better to be alone with God: His friendship will not fail me; nor His counsel; nor His love. In His strength I will dare, and dare, until I die.” And we know that God Himself is in life’s struggle.

But that is not all; the life of service, if we will follow it faithfully, will take us one further step. It is popular today to speak of Christianity as the religion of the Cross. That is not true. Christianity is not the religion of the Cross; it is the religion of the Resurrection. It is not the religion of vicarious sacrifice; it is the religion of a certain and joyous triumph through and over that sacrifice. We are not speaking of any particular theories of Jesus’ resurrection, but of the central conviction of Christianity which became real to the first disciples in their experience of the resurrection—the conviction that beyond the apparent defeat of today there lies the glory of tomorrow and that, in the end of the day, God and the Good do prevail. This, rather than any theories about the Cross, was the faith of the first disciples which brought Christianity into the world. It has been the faith of the Church whenever Christianity has held power for the world. It is a radiant, a triumphant, a power-bringing faith. There is nothing which our world so much needs now as a Gospel of the Resurrection.

⁷ W. H. Moberley in “Foundations,” p. 322.

Take one example only—our faith in ideals. The progress of our spirits with regard to moral idealism should mark three stages. The first is the naïve idealism of youth; that we all know. The second is the disillusionment of experience; there most of mankind rests. But there is a third—the seasoned and realistic idealism of maturity. It is the mature mind's discovery that those exuberant ideals of youth were *true*—much less clear and unmistakable than our early enthusiasm had imagined, much less easy of realization than our youthful confidence had supposed—but *true*. No idealism is sound which is not the tempered product of the furnace of life's realities. But no realism is full which does not issue in such seasoned idealism. That is part of the faith of the Resurrection—the mature mind's certainty of the reality of youth's dreams.

One whose right to speak we have already noted has put it thus:

"The conviction that in after life we must struggle to remain thinking as freely and feeling as deeply as we did in our youth, has accompanied me on my road through life as a faithful adviser. Instinctively I have taken care not to become what is generally understood by the term, a man of ripe experience. . . . What we are usually invited to contemplate as 'ripeness' in a man is the resigning of ourselves to an almost exclusive use of the reason. We believed once in the victory of truth; but we do not now. We believed in our fellowmen; we do not now. We believed in goodness; we do not now. We were zealous for justice; but we are not so now. We trusted in the power of kindness and peaceableness; we do not now. We were capable of enthusiasm; but we are not now. . . .

"Grown-up people reconcile themselves too willingly to

a supposed duty of preparing young ones for the time when they will regard as illusion what now is an inspiration to heart and mind. Deeper experience of life, however, advises their inexperience differently. It exhorts them to hold fast, their whole life through, to the thoughts which inspire them. It is through the idealism of youth that man catches sight of truth, and in that idealism he possesses a wealth which he must never exchange for anything else. . . .

"The ripeness, then, that our development must aim at is one which makes us simpler, more truthful, purer, more peace-loving, meeker, kinder, more sympathetic. That is the only way in which we are to sober down with age. That is the process in which the soft iron of youthful idealism hardens into the steel of a full-grown idealism which can never be lost." ^s

To such a ripe conviction the pathway of service should lead us. And then we know that in life's struggle, our powers are linked with the limitless resources of the Living God.

In their quest for a fuller and more worthy life, men have always sought power from religion. And they have always tended to expect it to come upon them in some miraculous and supernatural way. To some it has come with suddenness and with cataclysm. But many have waited and waited in vain. Religion has disappointed them because they sought from it something it was prepared to give, but have sought it by ways through which religion could not give it. For we must believe that the powerful life is the normal life, that God is ever seeking to make available through the normal channels of our spiritual living power fully adequate for our needs, and

^s Albert Schweitzer, "Memoirs of Childhood and Youth," p. 97f.

that the laying hold of this power is not a matter of some supernatural gift from on high but of the fulfilling of the conditions for the full health of our spirits. To the God we have sought to discover in these studies, there must be one primary condition—the alignment of the objectives of our effort with the Purpose of His life.

It is said that when they were constructing one of the great suspension bridges across the East River in New York City, much of the preparatory construction had been completed when the engineers ran upon an obstruction in the bed of the river at a point where one of the great piers was to be placed. An old barge had sunk and become imbedded in the mud of the bottom. Steel cables were made fast to the obstruction and connected with powerful engines on the bank, but the barge would not move. Then derricks were placed on rafts, the rafts floated out into the river above the wreckage and an attempt made to lift the barge in that way; still it could not be moved. The services of divers were employed, but with no success. The experienced engineers in charge were baffled. Then a young lad just out of technical school asked for permission to try his hand. Half-derisively, his superiors consented. At low tide he had an empty barge towed out into the river just above the obstruction and its ends made fast to the ends of the barge which was imbedded in the mud. Then he left it there. As the tide came in from the Atlantic Ocean, up through the Narrows and into the East River, the barge on the surface of the water was lifted, the barge at the bottom came with it, it was towed away and the construction of the bridge resumed. The young engineer had linked to his task the limitless power of the ocean tides.

It is a parable of our life. For just in so far as we

place the purpose and the consecration of our life in the main stream of God's great Purpose for the world, we link the weakness of our human resources with the immeasurable strength of God Himself.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER X

ETERNAL LIFE

"Brothers, I for one do not consider myself to have attained anything; my one thought is, by forgetting what lies behind me and straining to what lies before me, to press on toward the goal, for the prize to which God through Christ Jesus is calling us."—Philippians 3:13-14.

I suppose there is no subject connected with religion in which most college students are so little interested as immortality. In spite of that fact, I am going to suggest that in our final study together we give our thought to the question of eternal life. And I do so for two reasons:

First, because the day will come (though for most of us it may still be far distant) when immortality will be a living question for us. We shall need to have some clear convictions about it. For the stark fact of death sooner or later comes close to the life of all of us, not so much when it threatens ourselves, as when it suddenly snatches from us someone whom we dearly love or someone for whose going there seems to be no purpose or reason. Then, though we may have fortified ourselves with all the arguments and convictions our minds can discover, we are likely to be swept off our feet into a confused sea of questionings. How much more if we have not thought about it at all! My conviction is that most of our intellectual difficulties about religion are fundamentally far more moral than intellectual. But most of

the rare cases I have known where students' lives were thrown into genuine confusion by intellectual uncertainty have centered around this experience—the loss of someone very close to them.

Second, because only through consideration of the problem of eternal life shall we get close to the heart of the living of life today. True thinking along these lines, far from being idle and self-centered speculation of those who ought to be busy remaking the world, is the most direct path we can discover to the meaning of the Christian life for you and me here and now.

The first thing I want you to see is that there must be life beyond this earthly existence of ours—immortality—if there is any meaning in life at all, any sense in the whole business, and, therefore, any God. Most of us never achieve sufficient perspective to see that, but it is inevitable.

1. If there is any meaning at all in the individual human life. It is all very well if you are thinking of someone who has lived a full and rich life, attained a noble and happy old age, and then passed on. But death does not always strike that way. What of the young lad of whom we spoke before, with all the promise of a glorious service before him, his family's great hope and one concern, stricken down with pneumonia while still in his teens? What purpose or reason can there be in that—that a life, carefully brought to the very threshold of its real usefulness, should be then snuffed out with no great service to humanity? The Universe is irrational as well as cruel indeed if that be the end of him. And it is not only his loss and his family's sorrow, but humanity's loss. In a world which is so much under the heel of selfishness, we

cannot afford to lose lives like that. Yet the same is true to a lesser degree of all when death comes. Especially if through contact with Christ we have come into that vision for life of which we have spoken so often, we see an ideal to be achieved of which our life here, however long, can be only a beginning. It is only as graduation approaches that we feel we have begun to understand what college is all about, how fully to appreciate it. Similarly, we are told, it is only as the end of life approaches that most of us feel we are beginning to get a solid grip on its meaning, are prepared to live it somewhat fully. If we become ready really to live and then are snuffed out, truly the whole thing is a farce. As Doctor Coffin well says, "If Jesus leads us into the life with God which we Christians know, he renders immortality indispensable if God is to maintain His own self-respect."¹ Unless this brief experience of ours on earth be simply chapter one in a long narrative, a tiny segment of a rounded whole which stretches far beyond the reach of our imagination, then there is no meaning in it at all.

2. Immortality is inevitable if there is any meaning at all in the life of the world, in the life of society. The dominant thought of the last generation centered around the idea of progress. Men found life's meaning in the gradual evolutionary development of this world. The far-off establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth was the goal; it was unnecessary and undesirable to look beyond that—for that gave existence its meaning and life its motive. But we are gradually coming to realize that all this was absolutely fallacious. As Doctor Fosdick puts it, "This earth, once uninhabitable, will be uninhabitable again. After the lapse of millions of years which, how-

¹ Henry Sloane Coffin, "Some Christian Convictions," p. 216.

ever long they may stretch out, will ultimately end, our solar system will be gone, without even a memory left of anything that was ever dreamed of or done within it. The Universe without God is not risky; it is a foregone conclusion; the dice are loaded. Whatever else may be true, progress on a transient universe has not done away with the need of God and life eternal."² All of that is true! And do you see what it means? In a Universe which is doomed to eventual decay, in which every achievement of man's genius and progress is finally to crumble to dust and be blown away, if life's only meaning is to be found in our earth's struggle for continuance, then truly life has no meaning at all.

The dilemma to which we are driven is clear. On our belief in immortality hangs our belief in the rationality of the Universe, on the rationality of life itself; or, to put it the other way, if life have meaning, then immortality must follow. Our attitude toward eternal life is important, then, for on it depends our reasonable attitude toward life. To the man who thinks, to the man who knows the facts about life, our human existence must be a colossal, diabolical joke unless this life is merely the first stage of a long, long life beyond.

To be sure, that is not the path by which most of us reach our belief in immortality, but rather through two other experiences: the confronting of death itself, and the confronting of certain lives. It is not those who are familiar with death, but those who face death for the first time who are most skeptical about the life beyond. Many have stood in the presence of death very often; some are called to minister in homes overshadowed by death many

² Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Christianity and Progress."

and many a time. And after the first shock of the starkness of death has passed away, there grows upon one an inescapable feeling, which is no blind hope, no pious doctrine, but much more akin to the wisdom of intuition, that this is not the end of the life which was there a moment ago, that one has witnessed a departure and not a death.

But the final testimony to immortality is far more convincing. It comes to us when we stand confronting certain lives, lives of great depth and richness and power, mankind's life at its highest. When we face human life like that, we sense that we are in the presence of something which is indestructible. "As one contemplates these witnesses of the spirit, the fate of the body becomes a passing incident in the continuity of their lives. It may be difficult to picture the form which this spiritual vitality may assume, but it is much more difficult to think of it as extinct."³ It has been said of the life of Jesus, "Its continuance was the corollary of its character."

True, the lives which so commend eternal life to us are few enough; but they *are* enough to prove the point—earnests to us of what eternal life shall be and is. They are examples in the concrete of the immortality of spiritual life. If there is a conservation of matter and a conservation of energy, how much more, in a Universe which in its fundamental nature is spiritual, must there be the conservation of spiritual values. And because spiritual values have no significance apart from an individual personality, indeed become increasingly significant as the individuality of the person increases, there must be the continuance of our individual lives. Finally, therefore, we believe in immortality because we believe in a spiritual Universe and

³ Francis G. Peabody, in "Religious Foundations," p. 139.

a spiritual Universe which does not preserve the thing which it exists to produce—the individual human soul—can have no meaning. It is a fiasco and a fraud.

Something like this is the argument which Browning puts in the mouth of David. The young lad has been brought into Saul's tent to try with his lyre to rouse the great man from his stupor of melancholy. As he plays and sings, exerting his whole soul to bring life and power back to the old king, his mind is excited to go on to thought about God and the life beyond. From the passion of his own love for Saul, he catches a hint of the greatness of the Divine Love. From his eagerness to bring fullness of mortal life back to the man whom he loves, he infers God's eagerness to bestow that greater gift—the life which knows no end.

“Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt his own love can compete with it? Here,
the parts shift?

Here, the creature surpass the Creator—the end, what
Began?

Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this
man,

And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet
alone can?

Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much
less power,

To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous
dower

Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such
a soul,

Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering the
whole?

And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears
attest)

These good things being given, to go on, and give one
more, the best?

Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height

This perfection—succeed with life's dayspring, death's minute of night?

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"Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt thou!

So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown—

And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath, Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!

As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved! He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my flesh that I seek

In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me, Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to see! See the Christ stand!"⁴

Concerning the nature of life after death, we know practically nothing save one thing—and we want to know only one thing—that it is good. Any attempt to imagine it or reconstruct it in its details is pure and idle speculation. That it is in some sense a continuation of all that is best in this life is logical. That it is in some sense far better than the best of this life we believe. That it continues us in the challenging tasks of this life we hope. But that it is good we are certain—that is one corollary of our basic Christian faith, that "to those who love God,

⁴ Robert Browning, "Saul."

all things work together for good." Death can therefore do us no harm. More than that no man wants to know.

"To contemplate the future as opportunity, not to repent alone but to repair; to think of life not as standing still, but as going on, and of death not as a condemnation but as a migration; to escape from a heaven of monotonous blessedness, and find a heaven of discovery, adventure, vision, and enlarging service; to be given a chance to redeem the blunders and follies which one so bitterly recalls; to believe that the shining witnesses of the spirit which have illuminated this life are undimmed by the incident of death and shine as the stars forever and ever—that is to think of the life after death, not as an answer to a problem, or as the satisfaction of a dream, but as the rational progress of the human soul from one room to another of a Father's House." *

You recall I said there was a second reason why we should consider the question of eternal life—because only so shall we get close to the heart of the living of life now. For the subject of our final study is not the future life but eternal life; not the time of immortality but the nature of immortality. For eternal life has no concern with time of life, but with quality of living. That is clearly the thought of the New Testament. If you and I are not living eternally now, at this moment, there is a strong probability that we never shall. If there be a sharp division between the saved and the lost in the next world and some lives go to a hell of some kind, it is only because they have so lived in this world that they would not find themselves at home anywhere else. As Henry

* Francis G. Peabody, in "Religious Foundations," p. 140.

Drummond once said, "Their spiritual lungs are not adapted to breathe the atmosphere of any other place." And if some lives go on into what we call immortality, it will only be because they have started to live immortally now and must continue so to live.

Do you see what light this throws on the meaning of our life now? It means that we are not starting off on a brief spurt of forty or fifty or sixty years, then to be snuffed out like gutted candles—a span of years to be crowded as full as time allows with experiences of whatever kind we happen to choose. It means that we are setting forth now on a path which stretches beyond the horizon the imagination glimpses—into eternity. In such a prospect, there is no room for the philosophy of "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." It is "work, serve, build, for tomorrow we live." Ruskin once gave as the direction for true architecture, "so build as to build for eternity." We might say, "so live as to live for eternity."

Then immortality is no subject for the meditation of the aged and infirm. It is the liveliest, most vital, most contemporary subject for youth, for this life which you and I are now living, this moment, *is* eternal life; or it is nothing at all.

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What, therefore, is the nature of this life of which we have been speaking in these studies? What does it mean for us so to live as to live eternally?

1. *It is a life of light but not clear vision*, at least not clear vision of everything. For this life is an adventure, an adventure in part into the unknown. And adventure means uncertainty; it means bewilderment; even harrow-

ing doubt. And so when life seems intolerably perplexing, confusion without and turmoil within, let us remind ourselves that it is of the nature of our adventure—part of the game, if you will. Great truth *does* come, for the most part, step by step. "I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me."

2. *It is a life of peace but not calm.* There is no calm in our own lives; life continues an unremitting struggle—a struggle between two sets of impulses and motives and ideals—a struggle to be worthy to breathe the air of eternity. And there is no calm without—in the world in which our lives are to be lived. There, too, the struggle goes on ceaselessly, bringing its incessant and impelling challenge to us. But there is peace—the peace of inner unity and of steady effort.

"Peace does not mean the end of all our striving;

Joy does not mean the drying of our tears.

Peace is the power that comes to souls arriving

Up to the light where God Himself appears." *

3. *It is a life of achievement but not recognition, of satisfaction but not success.* It may bring that which the world calls success; more probably it will not. It may bring that which the world calls wealth; more probably it will not. It *will* bring an inner sense of at-onement—with ourselves, with the world, with life. It will bring an assurance that the powers of life are indissolubly linked with the resources of God, who shall, at the end of the day, bring His Kingdom into reality. More than that, it will bring an immediate inner sense to each individual life, "Well done, good and faithful servant." For him who is in earnest about life, who is seriously seeking the

* G. A. Studdert Kennedy, "The Suffering God."

fulfillment of his own destiny, what other end, what greater reward than that can life hold?

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The passage which stands at the head of this chapter is not the buoyant optimism of the young enthusiast; it is the considered declaration of an old man. It is not Paul's hope as he began his life's work; it is his faith as he faced his life's end—for the letter to the Philippians is probably the last letter he ever wrote. He is already past sixty, possibly past seventy years of age. His body, never strong, is wracked and torn and weakened by well-nigh incredible suffering, by scourging, by travel, by starvation, by shipwreck, by imprisonment. As he writes, he is chained to a Roman soldier. Ahead there is no prospect except further imprisonment and eventual martyrdom—a martyrdom which probably came a few months at the most after the letter was completed. It is the valedictory of a dying man. But it is the valedictory of a man who has absorbed into his being the experience of eternal life, who has already passed from death into life. And there is no better manifesto of purpose for a young life on the threshold of its career:

"Brothers, I for one do not consider myself to have attained anything; my one thought is, by forgetting what lies behind me and straining to what lies before me, to press on toward the goal, for the prize to which God through Jesus Christ is calling us."

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